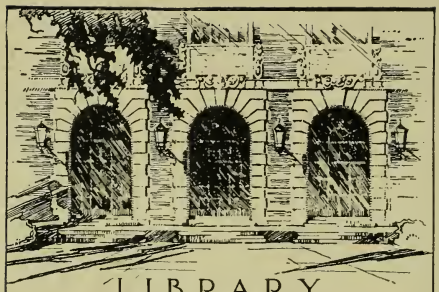

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MISS RUSSELL'S HOBBY.

MISS RUSSELL'S HOBBY.

A Novel.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MISS RUSSELL'S HOBBY.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

"JACOB," said Miss Russell, one day, "stay here a little while, I have something to say to you." He immediately came and stood opposite her, with every appearance of respect and interest. "Of course you see what every one else is talking of. I know you to be a very singular person, without any habit of observation, but I conclude you have seen Mr. Spencer's marked attention to Jane?"

There was a visible start—a change in his whole face, as she said this.

"Come, come, don't be affecting ignorance. Don't ask! Unobservant and dreaming as you are, you must have seen this. It was not so much to inform you of the fact that I asked for this interview, but it is necessary for you to be very guarded in your conduct. We took this girl from her natural friends, and we are bound to watch her interests, and——"

"Entirely, undoubtedly so," he said.

"Don't interrupt me! To watch her interests I was saying. There is no denying that such a match as this is far beyond her deserts or expectations. She is called pretty, and men

are always caught by that, I suppose. She is certainly a singular character, as odd as you are, in her way. She swears by your word, and always obeys even your looks."

He walked away; and for a moment stood with his back to his sister, as if looking out of window.

"Come, pay attention to what I am saying, for it is of absolute consequence for you to give your support, your authority——"

"Do you mean," he said, suddenly turning round, and speaking hurriedly, "do you mean authority in the sense of obliging her against her will?"

"Nonsense, Jacob! 'Against her will,' when she is always with them, laughing and giggling and flirting! Matters were differently conducted in my day. Of course she likes him; he is a handsome man, and very pleasant, but her temper is high and haughty, and her head is turned, so that out of vanity and a spirit of coquetry she may spoil her own prospects; particularly if you go on coaxing and making much of her, as you do. It makes me sick to see it, and just now it will do her harm. Show her how pleased and surprised you are at this chance for her. Promote the affair; which you can do best by leaving her alone a little."

He took advantage of a pause to ask. "You are sure she wishes it? because, I have—sometimes—I have half fancied she wished to avoid him."

"Very likely! Just like her! That is pure coquetry and nonsense. Trust me, I am sure she is 'in love,' as they call it; any one can see it."

He took a few turns up and down, and then said, "Thank you, sister, for saying all this. Certainly, she is like one of ourselves, and she may reckon on me for my cordial—I mean

my sincere—approval, if—if it makes her happy. Will you do me the favour to say this, if it is desirable?"

"I am sure the girl wouldn't marry any one, at least so she would pretend at first, unless you approved," returned Miss Russell. "She is quite silly about you, as far as that goes. And doubtless knows well what she is about, and has her own motives."

"I would rather not allude to the affair to her yet," Mr. Russell said, without noticing his sister's speech. "But tell her what I said. God knows, I wish her happiness—yet I had not thought of losing her so soon: we shall miss her, sister."

He took Miss Russell's hand and pressed it to his lips. She looked half pleased, yet turned it off with, "Pshaw, Jacob, don't be silly; we can't keep the girl, and I don't wish it. Indeed it is high time she was gone somewhere, for people will talk, and I am glad to the heart of this happening."

He dropped her hand and very soon left the room and the house; and did not leave his business all that day till late in the evening. He complained of a little headache when he returned, and sat with his hand covering his face for a long time. On looking up suddenly he caught Janet's eyes fixed on him, with so wistful a gaze that he rose from his seat and went up to her—apparently about to ask what was the matter. But he checked himself, and turned away again, pacing up and down the room; after a little while it struck him she might construe his gravity into displeasure. That must not be. So he tried to rouse himself, and asked her, with a hearty attempt at cheerfulness, where she had walked or driven, and other questions.

"Will you still let me go to Old Wareham one Sunday

with you?" she ventured to ask, as he stood near her a short time afterwards.

"Will I let you?" Then changing his voice he added, "Of course you shall go, my dear, and—and the Spencers. I dare say they will like to go with us, hey?"

Janet sighed. "I should like to go with you," she said.

"Should you? Well, we will see about it." He felt it his bounden duty, however, to add, "I think we had better ask them, hey? What will Mr. Spencer say——"

But he did not conclude his sentence. Janet rose hastily, and in doing so upset her work-box and its contents. While she stooped to gather them up more than one tear dropped on to the floor.

It was not many days after this conversation between Miss Russell and her brother, when one morning after breakfast, Mr. Russell, having consulted his weatherglass and brushed his hat, left the house for his work. Miss Russell looked hard at Janet, who was absently twisting about a teaspoon.

Anna made a little stir and commotion among the plates, and altered the position of the loaf, then looked also at Janet and then at her sister, while the little tiny curls "vibrated ominously." Miss Russell drew up into her most stately position, at a respectable distance from the back of her chair, between which and Miss Russell, however, be it remarked, there was never any kind or degree of intimacy. Silence was broken at last by Anna's saying in a quick, flippant manner, "I am shocked at you, Janet; indeed I am positively shocked, and grieved too!"

Janet threw down the spoon and looked up quickly.

"Oh! you may look! but I am tired of your looks! they

are by no means proper looks, or looks that a nice, modest, grateful young lady should have. Really I don't know what you can be made of! So unimpressible or so thoroughly heartless. I don't believe you have a scrap of heart or feeling! Your manners to Mr. Spencer are quite disgusting! —positively disgusting! I only wonder at his forbearance, or how he stands it for a moment."

"I always did say," interrupted Miss Russell, "that reading and music injure the heart as well as the body. Jane is spoilt; and I must say, Anna, you have done all you could to spoil her! Ah! if *my* advice had been followed!—However," added she in her most severe manner, "you are to be fine lady, it seems, so you had better conduct yourself as one. Here is a good chance for you, owing to your position with us—a far better one than you had any right to expect. You are aware that you are entirely beholden to us for everything——"

"I hope soon to be independent—to gain my own bread!" interrupted Janet, bitterly. "I have worked and toiled to fit myself for a governess—I have entreated you to find me a situation——"

"Will you allow me to speak?" said Miss Russell, wrath gathering in her face; "may I be allowed to finish my sentence. A governess truly! Who would take you? a half-grown thing with such health!"

"Yes, indeed," said Anna; "who would take a governess who has to lie down and play the invalid, I should like to know?"

"And requires port wine every day," chimed in Miss Russell. "You have no chance for years to come as a governess, and you are not strong enough for a lady's maid; which

indeed seems beneath the notice of a convict's daughter, now-a-days!"

Janet was highly excited—her breath came quick and hard—her face was crimson and pale alternately, and though she nearly bent the teaspoon double which she had again taken up, she said nothing, but turned her eyes, first on one speaker, then on the other, with mingled looks of surprise, anger, and entreaty.

"And now, once for all, Jane," said Miss Russell. "Our minds are made up. Behave yourself gratefully and properly to Mr. Spencer, and don't quarrel with your own bread and butter. If *he* is willing to overlook the connexion I can't see what objection *you* can have. Make yourself agreeable, and let this affair be settled—or you'll live to be a beggar. You'll be as your mother is, mark my words!"

"Mr. Lewis thinks it a very desirable thing," said Anna. "He quite agreed with me, and was good enough to say what a sweet reward we should have for all our labour and trouble! And Janet," added she, brightly, "I assure you it is better to be Mrs. George Spencer—able to do so much good, endow schools, head subscriptions, and all sorts of things—than to be a poor governess, who is always Miss Nobody to the end of her life!"

"And what right have you or I to take all this for granted?" said Janet, blushing.

"Nonsense! That is affectation, Janet," said Anna. "Of course any one can see—we can all see; besides Mr. Spencer has talked of it, and I know very well, if you would only behave as you ought, and give him an opportunity, he would speak to you."

"And what if I don't wish to give him the opportunity?"

"Not wish, Janet! do you mean to say—do you mean to try and make me believe that you don't like him?"

"Besides," remarked Miss Russell, "whether you do or not you ought to think that *we* are the best judges, and *we* all consider it your duty to——"

"Every one likes him!" interrupted Anna. "Half the ladies in Wareham are in love with him!"

Janet answered by a contemptuous, scornful smile.

"It is your *duty*," repeated Miss Russell. "Under your circumstances I wonder you need to be reminded of it—we all wish it, especially my brother."

"Does—does Mr. Russell wish it?" asked Janet, in a forced tone of voice.

"Jacob? To be sure he does! why, we were talking of it the other day, and he said quite heartily that he liked Mr. Spencer and Mrs. Spencer and all the family, and that he rejoiced in your acquaintance with Agnes."

"And he wished it?" repeated Janet, in the same manner.

"Why, Jane, you must suppose he would wish it!" said Miss Russell. "Jacob is a very kind and very liberal man—a very peculiar man altogether is Jacob; but of course he works hard to maintain us—he will not be a young man always, and can't expect to work for ever; of course you must see that he is delicate about it—it is Jacob's way; but though he doesn't say much of it—it would be a gain—a great relief to see you settled; so creditably too—so satisfactory to his feelings."

Janet drew a long quivering sigh—the fire in her eye was gone. She seemed like one crushed—her little head, usually so erect, drooped, and her step was heavy and uncertain as she walked towards the door.

"You understand then, Janet? We shall promote it in every way. You need fear no obstacle on our parts," said Anna. "And after all the world will see that we have done well for our protégée, as dear Mr. Lewis calls you!"

Janet shut the door quickly with some of her former spirit and excitement of manner, and then locked herself into her own room—but *not* to study!

At dinner-time Jacob remarked how ill Janet looked, and that she had no appetite. He hoped Miss Agnes Spencer would come and tempt her out, and he advised her to take a shawl and sit on the rocks, that she might enjoy the fresh air without too much fatigue.

Before the dinner things were quite removed, Agnes herself came, full of smiles and pretty ways, particularly to Mr. Russell. She said her brother and sister were gone to Exeter to see some friends there, and did not return till the next day. She wanted Janet to walk with her, and her mamma had expressed a wish that she would return and take tea with them, and see the toilette cover. She knew it was of no use to ask the Miss Russells, as it was lecture evening; "but," and she put her hand on his arm, and looked as if she could not be refused, "would you, Mr. Russell, come? Just in a quiet way, you know. Mamma would be so glad, and I should be so flattered, and then Janet will have some one to walk home with her. Mamma was regretting George's absence for that!"

Jacob looked and felt pleased at the invitation, and more at the manner: he said he would certainly come, but now she must excuse his running away, it was already past his hour.

The Miss Russells begged Agnes to thank Mrs. Spencer

for her polite attention, but they considered themselves as always engaged on Thursday evenings.

Anna added, that "she could wish others knew the loss they sustained in not doing the same. Of course strangers could not be expected to appreciate Mr. Lewis as they did; it required time to know his value; but, she must say, she did wonder at Jacob!"

"O, but Jacob is a very singular man, Anna, very," said Miss Russell.

Janet did not keep her friend waiting long, and they followed Jacob's advice and went to the beach. Many people were there. Some reading, some lying in enjoyable drowsiness, lulled by the splash of the waters; others sketched; and there were groups of many children throwing stones into the sea, or standing very near, and then enjoying the race to escape a wetting. Agnes and Janet found a quiet little corner and a convenient rock. Janet feeling wholly disinclined to talk had brought a book: it was a selection of poetry lent her by the Mitchells, and she picked out bits and read them to Agnes. But Agnes was too much amused in watching the people near them to be a good listener, and was continually calling her companion's attention to this "odd creature," or that "nice-looking person."

There was one gentleman at the farther end of the beach who attracted Agnes' attention very much, and, at last, Janet's. He was trying to climb the cliffs by some niches made in the rock, and which went by the name of The Steps. Agnes said it made her giddy to look at him; and Janet said she should not mind going up at all herself, and she well remembered doing so with—with her father, at some sea place (hesitating as she pronounced that name)—and, singular

enough, there was something about that gentleman's look which put her in mind of Manchester.

Agnes loved to get Janet to talk of her old home, partly because she thought it did Janet good, and partly because Janet's history was so new and striking to her.

They were interrupted at last by Mr. Russell's coming down to the beach and looking about as if to find them. They were partly screened from his view by the cliff, but Agnes jumped up and ran towards him. He thought they had sat long enough, and persuaded them to take a turn as far as the stile on the cliff walk, not farther, on account of Janet.

As they went on, they met the same gentleman who had climbed The Steps, and they had to separate a little to allow him to pass, the path being narrow. Janet was first. The stranger looked earnestly at her, and she at him; and after they had gone on a few steps, Agnes saw him still watching them.

"He is very like an old friend of ours," said Janet.

When they turned homewards they again met the gentleman. He half-spoke to Janet, and mentioned the word, "Nairn."

She rushed forwards, saying — "It is Mr. Roberts, surely?"

Jacob and Agnes passed on, and the usual exclamations and inquiries were made when old friends meet unexpectedly after a long absence.

"I have often longed to hear of you," said he. "Not one word—at least nothing satisfactory—have we heard since you left Manchester." He then asked her where she was, what were her prospects; and then he begged to be introduced to

her friend; and said he was here only "en passant,"—in fact, he intended going on to-morrow.

When Jacob pressed him to return home with them, he said he could not, having an invalid friend at the inn; he should be happy to see Mr. Russell there if he could give him his company in the course of the evening, and promising to see Janet to-morrow morning, he now said good-bye.

"What will you do about going to Mrs. Spencer's?" asked Jacob, kindly; "I dare say they will, under the circumstances, excuse you."

Agnes begged she would do exactly as she liked best; and Janet, after a moment's thought, said she should still like to go. Perhaps she preferred the Spencers' company to the Miss Russells'; or perhaps she was glad to go and see the toilette cover, in which she had appeared to take such interest.

Mr. Russell went back with them; but after tea he made apologies to Mrs. Spencer, and explained why he was obliged to leave the party, promising to return and fetch Janet at ten. Mrs. Spencer expressed much kind interest in the event, and Janet explained that Mr. Roberts had been an old friend of her father's, and a near neighbour. He was a merchant and a widower, with no children, said to be very rich. He used to give her handsome presents on her birthday, but she had never heard of him or of any one at Manchester since she left. She hardly knew whether this unexpected meeting gave her most pleasure or pain.

This led to a rather serious conversation, in which Janet felt more drawn towards Mrs. Spencer and her friend than ever, and she keenly regretted its interruption from a sharp ring at the door bell, and the entrance of one of the Wareham

"beaux," a Mr. Morris, who had lately been a pretty frequent visitor at Rock House, and whose long list of odd stories and anecdotes amused Mrs. Spencer, but rather bored the volatile Agnes.

Mr. Russell found Mr. Roberts alone, his friend having retired to his own room, being an invalid, for whose sake entirely they were making a tour in the South of England.

Mr. Roberts expressed himself as extremely astonished at having met and recognised Janet Nairn; but added, "to be sure, that peculiar foreign look she has inherited from her mother, caught my eye in a moment: and then I do not forget faces quickly. But how came she here? I thought her mother, or rather step-mother, lived at Exeter? From thence, the few business-letters I have received were dated. She did not name Janet's having left her, though she said the boy had died on the passage from Liverpool."

"Quite by chance, as one may say, we—that is, my sisters and our clergyman—became acquainted with the circumstance of Mrs. Nairn's having come ashore, in distressing case, with the little boy dangerously ill. We—that is, my sisters—being without ties, desired to take the poor little girl, who, perhaps you know, was not very happy with Mrs. Nairn: and, indeed, at that time they seemed in great want of money."

"Very likely, sir. Poor Nairn left nothing, of course, but a very small settlement for his wife. After it was all over, she left Manchester to join her own relations in the West of England. But a misunderstanding arose, unfortunately, between her and myself, and I have heard little of them since they left. Poor Nairn! my heart bleeds for him! To think of such a man falling so low! Driven to it, sir,

I must say, and always shall say—driven to it—by a broken heart! What, sir, is a man to do with such a wife? Dreadful case, sir, very!"

"Of course," said Mr. Russell, "I understand to what you allude; we, unfortunately, witnessed enough to know how trying her habits must have been to any husband. But I know little of the history of the family, and I should be really glad to know all I may with propriety hear. I may tell you, as a justification of what might seem like impertinent curiosity, that I—that we—have adopted the girl as our own, in every respect; and—and just now, it seems not unlikely, she may marry into a very respectable and desirable family. So, sir, you see——"

"Exactly, sir. Of course. Well, she is by birth entitled to stand well. The Nairns are a good and old family. Her father was a younger son of a younger branch of what was an old Scotch family. They were poor and proud, and the cadets sought our country to make some money. Nairn, Thomas Nairn, was a solicitor, as his father was before him, of good repute in Manchester. It was a thriving business, and bless you, sir, he was a fine young fellow as a man could wish to see. A general favourite was Tom Nairn. A kinder-hearted man never put pen to parchment, sir. He was loved and courted everywhere. When still very young he fell in love. Bless me, sir, what mischief little Cupid does make now!—Beg pardon, but you are a—a bachelor yourself, I believe? Ah! well—there is much to be said in favour of single life and liberty; and, to be sure, Tom Nairn made a mess of it. He was very desperate after a beautiful creature, a singer, one of those foreigners who come here to win British money. I forget her name; but indeed she was

lovely, and he did the honest thing by her, and offered his hand and his heart. She took him, and after presenting him with a couple of children—Janet is as like her as possible, sir—what did she do? but played the coquette, as she could do it with her eyes and her fan and no mistake! with a certain baronet, who shall be nameless. Bless you, sir, Nairn grew sore-hearted and angry, and she blinded his eyes and sang away his doubts, while all the time the good-for-nothing thing of a foreigner drew on the baronet; and, one morning, when my friend returned from London, where he had been on business, he found—why, all the old story so often told, sir, and which will continue to be told as long as men are such fools as to be cajoled by pretty faces. He mourned her long. Nothing would rouse him. His business was neglected; his food untasted. He would cry over those children for hours! The ungrateful baggage lived to come to want and misery; and he helped her out of it, and gave her every comfort on her death-bed, and buried her, too, at his own expense. This I happen to know, sir. Well, at last came to our town—from these parts, too—a dashing belle, to visit some relations. She made great stir. Very handsome she was—a fine woman, sir, but quite of another sort from Mrs. Nairn. Somehow she took a liking to poor Tom, and by dint of pitying him and petting the babies, she got him to take her to his home as a second wife. Unlucky was the day! She had not half-a-crown of her own, but she loved dress, and extravagance, and show. She gave parties, dinners, and balls; and set up her carriage and just dashed off, but he kept at home mostly, and never recovered his merry looks. If ever a man was ruined by being yielding and soft, 'twas Tom Nairn. He neglected his business a

good deal, and odd rumours went about—servants, old servants, left suddenly, and told of his tears and her vile habits. She had two or three children, I forget which. Everything went to ruin. Cheating and waste in the house, and he had no heart to work or show himself. Debt increased, till at last, I hardly know how, he gambled; and then, sir, he put his name to a bill. It was found out, for Tom had no wit to hide it, though he meant to repay it and rob no one. The upshot was, he was tried for forgery and convicted. He is in New South Wales, and writes pretty cheerily considering all. I do believe he was glad to be off and leave her. She soon left with all she could manage to take—some trinkets and a little money. And now, sir, you know all I know; and as a friend of Nairn's, I will say, I think you are an honour to humanity, sir, by standing friend to the girl. Singular coincidence, isn't it, that I should stumble so on the little black-eyed girl, who has sat on my knee, ay, scores of times?"

After a short pause, Mr. Russell asked if he had lately heard from Mr. Nairn?

Yes. Mr. Roberts had a letter at that moment in his pocket which had been forwarded to him from Manchester.

"Would Mr. Roberts have any objection to Janet's reading it?—she had never received one line."

"None in the world! Take it home to her, sir. How oddly things turn up! That I should get the letter here, and fall foul of Nairn's darling Janet, and find her so comfortably provided for! Really, sir, you have acted the good Samaritan, and if the father knew he would be very grateful and relieved: and he shall know it, too. You will see, if you read that, how anxious he is about his children. Poor

fellow !—wanted ballast, sir—determination of character, sir ! "

Jacob sat on for a little, but finding he had heard all—at least, all he liked to ask, or much cared to know—and getting impatient, according to his wont, to be alone and think it over, before giving Janet the pleasant surprise of the letter, he rose to take leave, not, however, without sincere and hospitable offers of lodging, &c. to Mr. Roberts and his friend.

The moon was rising in all her calm, cold beauty, and casting a chain of diamond sparkles on the gently heaving sea. It was very still, nothing was heard but the ripple on the shore. As he walked on, the chapel lights appeared, in dull-red contrast to the white moonshine. He thought how long the lecture must have been ; but as the thought crossed him, the lights went out, and he stopped under a lamp to look at his watch. It was not nearly so late as he had fancied. There was full an hour before he could give Janet the letter. He would not read it till she had done so, and he hesitated a moment whether to take a stroll on the promenade and enjoy the lovely evening, or go at once to Rock Cottage. Mr. Russell was pronounced by people in general to be very unsociable, yet he found great attraction in some society, and that at Rock Cottage was peculiarly genial to him. There would also be music, he guessed, so with two pretty young faces and pleasant voices before him, and the quiet refinement which surrounded, and stamped the household arrangements, and which had a great charm for him, though perhaps unconsciously, he set off at a quick pace, and came into the room in time to hear Agnes sing his favourite ballad. She looked round at him and smiled a sweet wel-

come, enough to fascinate any man, as Mr. Morris, the lawyer, thought, who envied such a reception. He had "dropped in" during Mr. Russell's absence, on some trifling excuse; but excuse was hardly needed, for Mrs. Spencer liked and encouraged such unceremonious style of visiting, and was generally "at home" to any one of her acquaintances who liked to come for an hour or so of an evening. The hour flew away with pleasant talk and good music. Towards the end Jacob felt rather excited at what he had to tell Janet; so much so, indeed, that Agnes remarked to her mother, when they were gone, that she really believed Mr. Russell was afraid of his sisters, and fancied they were late and should be scolded, he went off in such a hurry. Mrs. Spencer could not believe that. The Miss Russells must be fond of such a brother; she did not see anything amiss. It had been a delightful evening; she only wished dear Eleanor and George had been there.

"I suppose, mamma, you guess the consequence of all this, don't you? You are prepared for what will happen?"

"My darling, you frighten me! what do you mean? Oh, you are joking. Well, I love to see you smile, Aggy; but I really couldn't think for the moment what you meant by 'consequence'—such a dreadful word!"

"I mean that my good brother is perfectly certain to fall in love with Janet, if, indeed, he is not deep in it already. You know his heart is rather susceptible in that way, and wonderfully elastic—no sooner down than up again. How many have there been already, mamma, hey?"

"My dear, I don't think George would like you to talk so. Poor dear fellow! he is so warm-hearted; he is easily

won, but you know, my dear, he was really disappointed about Laura."

"So it seems, indeed, mamma. Janet's eyes have had a wonderful effect in curing him, don't you think so?—or is it Wareham breezes?"

"He is much better, and very cheerful, thank God!" said the mother. "And so you think, Aggy, he is in love with that pretty sweet creature? Well, I am sure if he likes it, I love her already, and he has enough to allow him to marry whoever he likes. I only desire to see my children happy, my love."

"That I believe you do," said Agnes, kissing her, "and I am glad to hear you like Janet, and now I shan't care. May the wooing speed, say I, and George will have a treasure of a wife. I am so happy!" and she danced round the table, her mother looking up from her knitting, and smiling.

* * * * *

"Would you mind going round by the Promenade, Janet? The night is very fine, and I have something to say to you," asked Jacob.

Janet said she should enjoy it, of all things. Her heart beat fast—she fancied he was going to speak to her of George Spencer, and then something of the morning's crushed feeling came back, when she had heard that he would be glad to have her settled; get rid of her, in fact.

She was relieved and surprised at his saying presently, "I have a letter here for you."

"For me!"

"Not to you, but for you to read."

Again Mr. Spencer was in her mind.

"A letter, Janet," continued Jacob, "which Mr. Roberts lent me, from your father."

How sudden was the revulsion of feeling! What had she been doing to forget Mr. Roberts, or to fancy it was on any other subject that Jacob wished to speak to her?

"How very kind! Where is it? Oh, how very kind! Yes, yes, it is his own writing," and she looked on it in the clear moonlight. "Ah, it has travelled far. Why, I wonder why he doesn't write to me? he can't have forgotten me."

"He has not, as you will find. And now you can write to him, Janet, and perhaps, ere long, you may be able to say that you are happy, and relieve his anxiety. I fear, however, I greatly fear, you cannot say that now. Forgive my asking you, Janet, but are you happy?"

"Yes, I am," and the tears would come, though she strove to keep them in. "If I am not it is my own fault. I am uncertain, and—in fact, I shall be better soon; I shall be happier, as you say, by-and-by, and I can give him that comfort at all events."

Jacob thought she alluded to the uncertainty about Mr. Spencer. It was not a subject he could talk about, however. His sisters said right when they spoke of his delicacy. Jacob was delicate, scrupulous to a fault. He was silent, and Janet let her tears fall in peace. At last she said—

"It is very kind of you to take so much trouble and interest;" and then remembering Miss Russell's words, she added, "I know I am a great burden, and—and—but never mind, perhaps I shan't be so long—I earnestly hope not. Why, surely, I am quite old enough to be——"

"To be what, Janet?" and as she turned to get through the turnstile at the end of the terrace, she saw his face.

Her's was immediately crimson. She knew what he was thinking of! Even he took it all for granted, and he was half smiling. She bit her lips, and turned the conversation once more to Mr. Roberts.

They had to listen to a little of Mr. Lewis's sermon second-hand, from Anna, and to bear a little scolding from Miss Russell about being too late. Then the bell was rung for prayers, and as Jacob "thanked God for all His goodness, particularly for His mercies of the past day," Janet thought his voice trembled, and it recalled her to a sense of her unthankfulness. She felt her trials bitterly enough, but did she feel as sensible of blessings? It was with a humbled (not now crushed) feeling that she opened the precious letter, when she was in her own room; and when she came to her own name, as "my darling child," "my sweet Janet," often repeated, her tears nearly blinded her. The letter gave her comfort; he was comparatively well off, and had been placed in some Government office almost immediately. Janet's horrid fear that he was working in chains vanished. She could picture to herself her father dressed as a gentleman, and though lonely, not utterly unhappy. He had met with kindness, particularly from a clergyman there, and he spoke of his punishment and sorrows having awakened him to a sense of his own irreligious and careless life. He expressed the greatest anxiety about his children, particularly for Janet and Tom, and feared that they would suffer from his sin and from their mother's habits. She read and re-read the letter, paused at every sentence, weighed every word; and, finally put it under her pillow.

CHAPTER II.

A VISIT TO OLD WAREHAM.

When Mr. Roberts was gone, and Janet had written a letter out of the fulness of her heart to her father, she felt that flatness which often succeeds stirring events. The fine weather, too, changed to showers, and heavy clouds in the west seem to threaten rain. Janet could scarcely believe that days, instead of hours, had not passed since that dreadful morning when she was spoken to by the Miss Russells. "But it was only yesterday, and he will return this evening, and then it will all begin again. However, to-night is clear at all events," thought she. But she was mistaken.

Before Mr. George Spencer partook of any refreshment, even while Eleanor was yet in her bonnet, he hastily and carefully took up a package from the hall table, and bent his steps to Queen's Terrace. He was full of spirits, and hardly shook hands all round before he tore off the brown paper, and displayed a rose plant in a pot—a delicate hot-house rose, with dark leaves, many buds, and just one lovely flower, drooping its soft white petals, as it seemed, from very richness of beauty, and showing what those exquisite buds would be by-and-by. Anna admired it much—wished Mr. Lewis

could see it, he liked roses so much; and while she talked, George pushed it gently towards Janet and said, in a marked manner, "I saw it in the Nursery Garden, and thought you would admire it. Will you give it a place in your room?"

Janet blushed, and felt shy, but tried to stammer out her thanks.

Both the Miss Russells seconded her, or rather tried to make amends for her few words—"It was so kind! They were sure Janet was delighted, only she was so shy."

One more look, and a pressure, rather than a shake, of the hand, and George was off. His mother was waiting, he had hardly spoken to her.

When Jacob came home he immediately remarked and admired the rose. Anna had the pleasure of telling its history, and expatiating on George's exceeding attention in coming so immediately. Jacob smelt the sweet flower, and spent a great part of the evening in looking at it. He said it was very beautiful; he thought people who had no gardens lost a great deal of pleasure.

"Consider the expense, though, Jacob," said Miss Russell. "Besides, it is great waste of time and great nonsense to care about flowers. A vegetable garden just enough to supply the family is very well—but I never could see the use of flowers."

"I have often wished for a garden, to give the school-children bouquets on their tea-drinking day. Mrs. Mitchell did once, and it looked very nice indeed. Oh, flowers are dear delightful things to decorate with—I must say I should like a garden," said Anna.

On Saturday Janet was happy in the thought of Sunday.

She again hoped that Jacob had not forgotten it, and said, "Will it be fine to-morrow?"

"Yes, I think it will; this is only a shower, and at last you will have your wish," said he. "You will be ready to start at ten, will you? The hill is long, and will tire you, I fear, even if we walk slowly."

It rained all Saturday morning—but in the afternoon it cleared up, and Agnes came as usual for Janet to walk. Janet went with an unwilling mind. She knew how it would be; and to make it still worse, Jacob joined them and continued to walk with Agnes, so she had George all to herself. Agnes's laugh and voice grated on her ear, even Mr. Russell's smiles were disagreeable. She did not repel George, however; she was simply spiritless and subdued.

He argued well from this, and thought her face more beautiful than ever when it was still. Janet made up her mind that George would spend the evening with them; but he did not, and she was thankful. She worked industriously at mending stockings for Miss Russell the greater part of the evening. The time had come now when Janet liked to do anything that was useful to help Miss Russell, or about the house—anything that relieved the pressing weight of being a useless burden!

It was as bright a Sunday as even Janet could desire. The vessels in the harbour had mounted their flags, and sailors in Sunday trim were lounging on the Quay. Janet was dressed betimes, and she read over the Burial Service before she left her room. She could not help considering this a sort of anniversary of Tom's funeral-day. She should once more stand over the grave with Mr. Russell. She was sure she could find it out among all the others. Everything

was fixed on her memory that passed on that day. Full of hope, she joined the breakfast in the parlour, and answered Mr. Russell's kind nod at the window, as if he was congratulating her on the blue sky, with a happy smile.

Jacob broke the fact to his sisters, saying that he particularly wished Janet to go there once. They were angry and annoyed, and thought it very improper and very imprudent. Jacob spoke a little more sharply than usual, and said, "he did not often upset their plans or ask a favour, he thought they might yield for once with a better grace." Then as if deprecating his own want of temper, he was more than commonly attentive to them in the civilities of the meal, and talked more than usual.

Hardly had Janet tied on her bonnet and taken her Prayer-book up, and while Betty was giving a polishing brush to master's *not* new hat, a carriage drove up to the door, and there was a loud rap-tap. George Spencer, all smiles and pleasure came in. He had heard of the engagement from Agnes, and they had both agreed the hill was too much for Janet. Their carriage waited to take her; and Agnes was nodding and smiling from it as she caught Janet's eye through the open door.

For one moment Mr. Russell looked rather disappointed, but catching Agnes's smile, he said, "It was very kind—very thoughtful, and certainly best for Janet."

Poor Janet! Instead of getting away quietly, here was a bustle! Instead of the walk with Jacob—the silent turn in the churchyard—here was a contrast! She had far rather not go now. Would that she were going to the chapel as usual! To see Tom's grave with all these people!—

The Miss Russells now appeared ready for chapel. They

could not say much; they thought the whole proceeding so bad a compliment to Mr. Lewis, and the taking out the carriage so wrong, that not even George's kind politeness could dispel it. They walked out in grave and dignified disapprobation—"the bell," they said, "was calling them, they must bid good morning."

Jacob said he must go too, but George wished him to take a seat in the carriage. He said Aggy had settled for him to sit with her—if Miss Nairn had no particular objection to the front? But Jacob would not hear of it. He set off in his usual way, and left the others to follow and overtake him.

There was no help for it. Janet silently, almost sullenly, allowed herself to be assisted into the carriage by George. He was annoyed too. Mr. Russell was unaccommodating, and half his scheme was spoilt. Of course Janet sat by Agnes now—and she leant back and left the brother and sister to talk or be silent as they pleased. Something of Janet's old feelings and spirit returned—she was angry. She thought it was interfering too much—it was taking advantage of her. Agnes had no right to settle things for her. Even her most private feelings were intruded on! Then after awhile she felt she was unjust; she saw that it was meant in pure kindness, and it was certainly considerate and thoughtful. Agitated by these contradictory feelings, and miserably put out, her countenance showed that she was not pleased. Agnes became grave and George was out of sorts, worried the horses and complained of the heat. They overtook Jacob—but George would not offer him a lift now. Janet was almost annoyed to see him smiling, when she was so unhappy; and when he crossed the road and put his hand

on the carriage, and talked to Agnes, her cup of trouble seemed to overflow. She was dissatisfied with herself all the time, restless, miserable ; but still the uppermost feeling was resentment against George Spencer.

She was determined to avoid him when they got out. Seeing Mrs. Grant, whom she knew a little, she went up to her and kept by her till they were going into church. Janet could not attend, the time was worse than lost to her, and when she left church she carried the additional weight on her heart of having abused a privilege—of letting words pass unheeded which could never be recalled — of losing, who can measure what amount of blessing ?

As the congregation crowded towards the porch, she caught hold of Jacob's arm in a hurried manner, and said, "Do let me come with you !"

He felt her tremble, and gently pressing her to him, he said, "You shall." When they reached the yard he was turning round the corner.

"No, no ; not now, not to-day ! I can't bear it. It is not as I supposed it would be," and she hurried him back to the path.

He saw something was the matter, but fancied it was from the association of the place. George was putting the harness to rights and looking grave. Janet said "Mayn't I walk home ?"

"He will be so hurt if you do," said Jacob, looking at George. In another moment he handed her in, and giving her a silent, warm shake of the hand, he turned down the hill. The drive home was not much better than the drive there; and so ended the visit, long desired and long delayed, to Old Wareham Church.

CHAPTER III.

SUNDRY TÊTE-À-TÊTE CONVERSATIONS.

Anna's interest in the Infant School rather gave way just now to the making up the match between her "protégée," as she once more called her, and Mr. Spencer. Hitherto Janet had been a subject of disappointment, but this would be a brilliant *finale*. All the Wareham people would be astonished! Anna was on stilts, and delighted to go from house to house and talk of the Spencers and their professions and expectations. She was very skilful in making opportunities for their meeting, and George's hearty thanks and his compliments (for he could flatter a little to gain a purpose) delighted her. When he became uneasy and anxious, Anna encouraged him, assuring him that the coldness was only shyness, and the lack of spirits her natural melancholy. "I know her so well, Mr. Spencer," she would say; "she has been like my younger sister or niece. I have watched every turn in her character. Trust me! I know her by heart. She has a great deal of character. She is young, too, and has seen so little of society, that her manners are in fault. Besides, how can she help liking you? Oh, I never flatter, but really, it is being over modest

for *you* to fear failure. And you are the very first person she ever liked. It is so new to her, you must excuse her, Mr. Spencer." And again George hoped and believed.

He was naturally an open person, and leaned on sympathy, and he now, besides Anna, made his mother and youngest sister confidantes. To say the truth, Janet puzzled him. Had she invariably been cold and distant he would have given it up, though his heart was very much in the matter, but she varied from day to day, just keeping hope alive; perhaps even stimulating his desire to win her, though nothing was further from her intention. She was distressed and unhappy. Miss Russell knew what she was about when she quoted her brother's approval.

The idea that Mr. Russell expected and liked it, and wished her settled elsewhere, often determined her in favour of the marriage, and to try and like George better. As an acquaintance and a partner she did like him very much. Why should she shrink from a nearer connexion? She needed counsel, and longed to seek it of Mr. Russell, but something always kept her silent. She was more reserved towards him than to any one now.

She told herself how agreeable Mr. Spencer was, and how devoted to her. She went over again the day when he had saved Mr. Russell's life, and when she thought she could never do enough to show her gratitude; there was everything that might win a woman's heart; and as to his being so very youthful, one of her greatest objections to him, that would mend itself. His family so kind, too! She did not deserve it—she was ungrateful and wicked! Under the influence of this feeling she threw a softness into her manners

and gratitude into her eyes, which touched him to the heart.

Then, again, at some, to him, incomprehensible turn in the conversation, or some shadow in her own mind, she became cold, restless and weary. She grew thinner, and a constant flush was on her cheeks—her sleep was disturbed, and she constantly made headache an excuse for staying in her room.

Matters went on in this unsatisfactory way from day to day till one evening, when walking on the cliff-path with Anna, Agnes, and George, she was fairly unable to keep up with their quick steps, and lagged behind, looking ill and worn. He turned on missing her, and ran back a step or so, to where she stood leaning against a rock. "You are tired—you are ill," he said, with tender concern. "Will you rest here? or will you not take my arm up the hill? Pray do," and he gently drew her hand on his arm. Holding it still firmly clasped in his he looked down at her. "Janet," he said, lingering on the name with evident pleasure. "Janet! I cannot bear to see you so sad! won't you tell me what vexes you?"

"Nothing—there is nothing."

"Don't put me off like a stranger! Janet, do you think that I care for you?"

She tried to speak, but failed.

"Do you, Janet?" he repeated. "I wish you could read my heart. I think you must do so a little; you know I love you, but not how much!"

"O don't say so! I wish you would not! I knew you were going to say something," she said, in great distress.

He smiled a little, and pressing the hand he held said, "If

you knew, may I hope it is not more unacceptable than unexpected?"

"O! I didn't mean—what have I said?" she stopped short, and covered her face with her hands in an agitated way.

"Don't look so, Janet! As if I was a horrible—I don't know what—an utter stranger! You said no harm. You must have seen my—my love—my desire to please you! Is it so very terrible that I should love you, and dare to say so? I am a selfish, thoughtless fellow, but I didn't mean to hurry or alarm you. I have been longing to speak—to open my heart, but I would not have done so now but for your sad looks. I know you have many trials. Believe me, it is my best desire and hope to comfort you. By Jove! it makes me nearly mad sometimes to see it!" he exclaimed, vehemently; "and if you will let me I will shield you henceforth from it all. I will indeed! Can't you—won't you trust me, Janet?"

"Mr. Spencer, don't say so—you are far above me in every way. You cannot really mean all you say; you must be trifling with me!" she exclaimed, with Miss Russell's remarks sounding in her ears, and she fairly burst into tears at the effort it was to say so much.

"You don't give me credit for common truth and honesty! You call me 'Mr. Spencer,' and treat me as if I was a scamp, who was trifling with you—insulting you!" He spoke as if deeply hurt.

Janet immediately felt the injustice she did him. She controlled her over-excited feelings as much as she could, and in a clear though still tremulous voice she said—"I am sure I don't think ill of you. Indeed, indeed, Mr. Spencer, I don't mean to be ungrateful! I don't—how can I?—think it an insult."

But he had turned away a little and was breaking down a bramble with his foot in an impatient and vexed manner. His face, too, was flushed, and she saw that she had deeply wounded him.

"Remember that conversation, some weeks ago, at your house, when you and Mr. Russell talked of some low marriage. Remember what *he* said then! I do!"

"What did he say? What low marriage?"

"Don't you remember?—and—I dropped the myrtle;—and he—Mr. Russell and you were talking so long together?"

"Ah, indeed! I do remember some absurd stuff of yours, very mysterious it was, about my picking the flower up, the sprig of myrtle which I shall always keep, Janet. But what has all that to do with what I now said?"

"There's meaning in it. People will say you stooped to pick me out of the—the dirt. Leave me alone! You are above me—what I now am. But I am content, I want no raising up."

"Content, are you! That's good! And what is it to me what people say?"

"It is something to *me*, and will be to you one day—to say nothing of your mother and friends."

"Then you consider any one who is led into liking you—led on—to propose making you his wife, is, in fact, insulting you! And this is the end of all these weeks' and months' acquaintance. I thought you knew me, knew us all better! What I have done to deserve it I don't know!" and kicking the broken bramble he put his hands in his pockets and faced round to the sea, as if wishing the air to cool his hot cheeks, and looking annoyed and very sad.

Janet was sorry. He had been so kind,—so delicately

kind! She held out her hand—"Please don't be angry. I spoke wrongly, and you have been always so kind. I know you meant no insult—forget that word, please! Do, Mr. Spencer, forgive me—O George, I am sorry—won't you forgive it?"

He could not resist her calling him George: hastily he clasped her hand in both of his, and anxiously sought to read her countenance. "O, Janet, you do like me a little! You do—you must! Not as I feel for you, of course. But never mind—give yourself to me. Join your fate and its troubles to mine! Let me only help you to bear what is sent. I lift you up? No, indeed! Rather it is you who will raise me and bring out what little good may be in me—if there is any. I'm a poor fellow, I know, now; though I have perhaps thought otherwise. All I can do worth anything is to love. I believe I can do that honestly and truly. Promise to be my wife, my dear wife, some day, and I won't hurry or distress you—I will not ever mention it again till you let me. Take your time if you wish it, before you say 'Yes.' Only for Heaven's sake don't repulse me—don't misconstrue my meaning!"

Janet was touched. It was pleasant to be so loved. Yet her impetuous and sincere temper would not bear any hiding the plain truth. There was much to tempt her—much to soothe and flatter her—in his generous offer. What chance would she ever again have like it? Yet now it was clearly right to speak out, however painful it might be.

"Janet!" he again said, for her hesitation was very trying to him just then.

"I am thankful," she began. "It is very kind of you——"

"Never mind that now," he put in impatiently.

"Your—your preference makes me glad and proud. I am, believe me, very grateful."

"I don't want gratitude," he broke in again. "Hang gratitude and preference!—I beg pardon! Janet, Janet, don't you see—can't you feel that I love you so dearly, and that I am longing to hear you say you return it—if ever so little? A little, surely! O Janet, I think you must! It seems to me as if mine must force it out of you. You are shy and afraid; but put your hand in mine, and I shall take it as a sign that you allow me to hope, and believe in me, and if not now, you will try to like me better and trust to me. Only try me, Janet!"

He was holding out his hand, looking imploringly at her. It was hard to withhold her hand—hard to disappoint him. Shaking her head, with grave and gentle sorrow, which so softened her eyes that poor George thought her more winning than ever, she tried again to explain herself. "I don't well know how to say it. But I know, I feel you are throwing away your love—your true love! I cannot return it—I cannot feel as you do," she said, in a distressed tone.

"I told you I did not expect it. You perhaps never may. I fancy I am not a fellow to inspire a very deep love. I believe it is always so—one to love, one to be loved; the greater absorbing the lesser, but making one for all that! But let me love you, may I, Janet? that is my question."

"O, George Spencer, that won't do! Think what you are about now before it is too late. Think of my position—my father—my—my—stepmother—my unfortunate temper too. You smile! but it is true: ask the Miss Russells."

"Hang the Miss Russells! Position and temper! Humbug!

That is for my consideration, not yours. And I don't marry your father or your stepmother."

"But I will never give up my father!" she said, quickly and proudly. "Recollect what Mr. Russell said that night about the wife (whoever it was) foreseeing the troubles which would come to her husband from her connexions. You are generous and good, but I am proud, though poor and low—I couldn't bear hereafter to feel I was a blot on your name; or that you were ashamed of my story. How will it sound that Mr. Spencer—the gay, rich Mr. Spencer, who might, as I heard them say so often, make a great match—picked up a little beggar who lived as a dependant with the Miss Russells?"

"'Picked up' again. That idea is engraved deeply on your mind, Janet! And do you think I could ever be ashamed to say I found my wife at Wareham, living in a family who had adopted her, when her own family were distressed and ruined? It is beneath you and me too, Janet, to say another syllable on this subject. You are proud, you say. If you are it will not hurt you to feel that—that having mixed pretty freely in society, and seen something of the world, coming here to this out-of-the-way spot I saw the girl, who from the very first moment gave me an odd feeling, and who, after a pretty intimate acquaintance with her, I would choose and select out of the whole world to be my own dear wife! Pride, pride! What more do you require? All that a man can give or offer I here beg, entreat, implore you to accept, Janet!"

"And if I did you would be an unhappy, disappointed man! Yes, indeed! For I cannot—never can return your love—and it isn't as if—as if—— You know," she added

faltering, and blushing deeply, "I can love—I know I can —it is in me—I mean—I am not one of those who can live calm and level all their lives. No, it can't be! and, indeed, I don't love you!"

He smiled, and coming very close he said, "Do you mean that you dislike me? Do you find my companionship disagreeable—irksome?"

"No! O no! At least only when the Miss Russells talk about you."

"Hang them! Dear me, I have a fit of swearing to-day —beg pardon! But they are marplots. They spoil everything! For goodness' sake, Janet, don't judge me by them —don't let their wretched words come between us."

"But—but—" Janet went on, not heeding this ebullition, "were I to marry you, I am sure it would be with different feelings from what I have always understood and read ought to exist. I ought to tell you this—I ought indeed. And you must not laugh at it—you may fancy you don't care now. But you will some day."

"If you will marry me, Janet, I'll not ask what your feelings are, or if they square exactly with those of novel heroines, who I suppose are your authorities. I will be content."

He smiled again at her, looking down, for she was little even beside him; a provoking smile she thought it, for he did not appreciate her doubts and difficulty. He seemed so to take it for granted she must love him. He had been spoilt —petted and made much of—so different from herself. He had borne no repulses or bereavement. Surrounded with love and affection, he could not realize the want of it where he loved, and perhaps the very novelty of his loving so very

much and not receiving tenfold in return added somewhat to his content and lack of doubt.

"It is no use to say more, you are determined not to hear or take it in," she said, rather annoyed.

"I do take it all in—I will ponder over it, too, I promise you, and try to digest the tough morsel. But—now—before we go on, Janet,—how shall it be?"

"No way! I can't indeed! Don't press me. It is cruel!"

"I will not. Well, then, rest content, I will not tease you. Not another word—only let me see you—let me be with you—and receive me as a friend. I will not take advantage, or reckon on anything as giving me consent: will you agree to this? I'll try and bear the suspense;—exercise patience," he said, with what she owned was a sweet smile, and speaking cheerily, though he sighed too.

"How can I help it. You are very good!" she said, with evident feeling, and she yielded her hand now to his warm clasp as he murmured thanks. Then he drew it on to his arm, and very soon skilfully led her into other subjects, drawing her on to be open with him. Ere long he had his reward, for her face was radiant and soft with pleasure and interest, telling him of her old home and those days which now seemed to her a kind of past Heaven.

As they came within sight of houses she would have withdrawn her hand from his arm, but he would not let her, and she was too sensible of his kindness and forbearance to like to risk his having that sad face he wore awhile ago. She had not fancied he could ever have looked so miserable!

She had spoken out, and could do no more. Things must

take their course now—the responsibility would not now be hers, if after all she could not like him. It was his own doing, and he must abide the consequences.

He managed to make the walk home so pleasant that she quite regretted it was ended, and frankly said so. "Well," he said laughing, as they reached No. 1, "I won't inflict any more of myself on you to-day. No! thanks, not to-night. I will go home, taking the long way and indulging in a cigar."

"To console you?"

"Exactly!" But he lingered, loth to go, holding her slight fingers in his, and ever finding one word more to say!

No one was at home but Mr. Russell, and Janet found him bending over her rose-tree, brushing the dust from the leaves. When he turned his face towards her she was struck with his appearance, he looked so ill, and careworn. On her remarking it, he answered with forced cheerfulness that it was nothing—nothing of consequence. He had been working hard all day, and had lost his walk, but a little music would set him to rights.

She hastened to take off her walking dress and he tuned his violin. While she played she thought, half bitterly and half sadly, of his working so hard, and the expense and trouble she was to him.

"There! Famous! Mozart can charm trouble, and weariness, and even the dust of business away. None like him for lifting one up, I think. That sonata is fine—the trio beautiful—the finale spirited and brilliant! I like the trio a little more drawn out and *ad lib.* just there," and he pointed with his bow. "Suppose we try it again. By the way, I am

requested to bring my instrument to Rock House to-morrow evening. I should like Agnes to hear this. You go for the day, I believe?"

Janet blushed, and said "Yes." She longed to tell him what had passed—to ask his advice, and she thought he would understand her; yet something held her back.

CHAPTER IV.

CLEVER FINGERS.

George Spencer was one of those enviable and rare individuals who was not rendered unpleasant by being deeply in love, even when the result of his attachment was in suspense. Perhaps he felt the importance of winning more from her, albeit he had said he would be content as it was. Certainly, however it was, he made himself thoroughly agreeable—not distressing her by direct allusions to what had passed, and only now and then, and when alone together for a chance moment (for this she avoided as much as she could), showing her his feelings. Yet it was a trying time for him, for not by any means always was Janet in so confiding and happy a frame as at the latter part of that important walk. She was variable, and sometimes retired into her shell so determinedly that not all his efforts to guess at her source of trouble and sympathize with her, or his interest in her tastes and thoughts, not even his best and funniest stories, could tempt her out—not even a glance of her eyes, or a transient smile could he get. At such times Miss Anna was his comfort. Janet would have been scornful had she known, after all his bitter exclamations against her, how he sought a repetition of her

assurance, that it was all woman's shyness, a sure symptom of love, and so on, given in Anna's most ornate and fluent style. His manner, though easy and intimate, was guarded, and so much did he avoid being too demonstrative, that Mr. Russell now and then doubted if his sister was right, and even meditated giving her a hint not to give Janet false hopes, or wrong impressions. She was so young yet, he thought! It was a pity not to leave her a little longer.

But according to his usual habit of content and acquiescence with things appointed, he confessed how great was the benefit of Agnes Spencer's society to Janet. So stifling an inclination to sigh with this thought, he yielded to the pleasure it was to him to watch "the young people." So attractive was it, that he left his favourite resort at the counting-house much oftener and earlier, and continued to join in the walks, or see them at home a great deal.

If Miss Russell observed this, she made no remark, for a wonder. But, perhaps, her mind was too fully occupied just then. With all her pretended contempt for such "silly, fantastical trifling," she liked people to like her brother—every one but Mrs. Grant, that is; and this intimacy with the Spencers was pleasing to her, in more ways than one. Agnes was the best of sisters, and was always ready to accompany George, to take off the "particularity," as she said. So it, of course, chanced that she was thrown a great deal with Mr. Russell, and, apparently, neither party objected to the arrangement. Her bright and gracious ways amused him, and warmed him into life and spirit. She could draw him out too into telling funny stories in a wondrously dry but humorous way, or relating his youthful adventures in Spain.

A month passed in this way smoothly and pleasantly, and

George Spencer was vexed at his mother's urging to have their plans decided. She grew anxious; for the time was approaching when she had settled to leave Wareham. Her children, all from different reasons, wished to stay on, and to please them, or promote their interests, she would willingly do so. She considered that it was high time for her son's fate to be decided, and she asked him how his wooing prospered. He said well enough, if Miss Russell would leave Janet alone; but whenever that lady spoke to her of it, Janet winced like a galled horse, and all his hardly-gained advance in the pursuit was lost; Janet became cold and forbidding directly.

Yet she knew in her heart that she had no reason to find fault with him. He had strictly kept his word, and although she could never for a moment doubt his love, he never annoyed her by speaking of it. Janet was only too willing to let things alone, each day bearing its own burden or pleasure, as it might be. She dared not look onward, and shuddered at the idea of a change. She was sometimes hurt at seeing so little of Mr. Russell. She fancied he avoided her, and this made her shy with him. Though she longed to ask his advice, yet, if it came to the point, she could not have done it.

"Janet, will you arrange these flowers?" asked Mr. Russell, coming in, early one evening, and, for a wonder, finding her alone. "Mrs. Grant brought them to me, but they are too fresh and bright for my counting-house."

Janet fetched water and vases, and with pleasure lighting up her face, for the first time that whole day, she set about her task. He watched her for a little while silently, then asked where all the others were.

All were out somewhere, she said.

"And why are you at home?"

"I was tired. I didn't want to go out to-day."

"Do the Spencers come this evening?" he presently asked.

"No, I think not," she said, colouring up. "I believe they all dine out."

"Then you have a solitary evening, for a wonder. Janet, all this society, when it fails—if it does fail—will leave us very dull."

"Will it? What did we do before they came?" she asked, with a faint smile.

"I hardly know. You see, I found them here on my return home. It is very good for you, Janet, to have such friends—quite providential that you met Agnes."

"Yes," she answered, quietly.

"How curiously things come round! To think that the countenance I thought so beautiful at that awful moment should now be our most intimate friend! I may really call him friend, so completely one of us as he seems to be—and —and to be even nearer, as I understand. Is it so, Janet?" he added, coming behind her, and laying a hand on each of her shoulders.

"How will it make him nearer to you?" she answered, boldly, prompted by she hardly knew what.

"In real point of fact, he will be no nearer, of course. Yet he will be so, if it turns out as I suppose it will. Have you written lately to your father, Janet?"

"No; not lately."

"Why so? I think you should. He would like to hear all."

"All what?"

"You know best. All about yourself."

"But there is nothing—nothing certain to tell him, if you mean that," she said, shyly.

"Indeed!" He was standing there, his hands still on her. She felt him sigh more than once; and she longed, while she dreaded it, that he would continue the subject. "How prettily you are placing the flowers! You have neat fingers, Janet—fingers ready for all sorts of work. Have all women clever fingers? My desk would not be such a heap of rummage and disorder, had I not such stupid hands."

"I should like to put your desk tidy, if I might—if you wouldn't mind."

"Mind it! Will you really do so, just once—before—before—— It must not be often; not a habit, lest I should miss it too much."

"Why didn't you tell me before? Didn't it ever strike you I might be a little bit useful in that way?" she asked, speaking more freely than she had done of late to him, though with a mournful cadence in the voice.

"Yes; it often did strike me that it would be a great pleasure to me, if you——"

"Then——" but she stopped short there.

"Why did I not ask, were you going to say? For one reason, I thought *you* might not like it; for another, my sister might object. Again—why accustom myself to luxuries which I must not expect to retain?"

"I should think it was no very great luxury for you to have some one to put or keep your desk tidy. If I couldn't do it—I mean, supposing I was not allowed" (here her voice became hard)—"or if I was away, 'governessing,' I mean—some one else could do it, I suppose."

"Perhaps I shouldn't care for 'some one else.' No; I am

used to my own untidy and ugly rummage—my sight is accustomed to it. One soon grows familiar even with ugly, disagreeable things—too soon. Once I rebelled against all such. Now I scarcely perceive it, unless called on to feel the contrast by seeing what is pleasing."

"I don't see why you should not have everything nice, and pretty, and comfortable," she said, indignantly. "You can afford it. Why do you submit—put up, I mean—with it otherwise?"

"It would not do me any good to indulge my natural love of luxury and beauty. I gave way too much to it at one time. I need hardening now."

"I can't agree with you, or understand you. Why are you always so self-denying and patient, never wishing for anything you have not got—never considering yourself at all?"

"No, child!—no! Not so; I am not self-denying, or patient. God knows how my desires war against circumstances—even now—yes, now!"

She felt his hands tremble, and then they were suddenly withdrawn, and he walked to the window.

"I wonder," Janet began, after a little silence, "now that no one is here——"

"Yes?—Go on!"

"I was going to ask if you would mind playing that thing—don't you remember, you promised you would one day—the air of your composing?"

"Aye, I know, child! To be sure I will. Somehow it will continually come to my lips; I constantly catch myself whistling it. Perhaps if I play it once or twice fairly through it may cease to haunt me."

"Don't you like it?"

"Well—yes, and no! It doesn't do me any good. I suppose," he added, lightly, and trying the strings, "that I am at that age when I need more brisk and inspiriting ideas, and not to indulge in mournful expressions."

He played it. To Janet it was a voice, a human voice—it was herself, telling out her sorrows, now passionately, now tenderly and pleadingly;—asking what her lips, however, never could ask;—and then, there it was—the answer which she wanted. Hark!—no sooner caught than lost again—one instant of promised rapture, and then it ceased, or was lost in other sounds. The desired haven, the bright dream-land, was just made visible, and then withdrawn. Would it come right at the end? Could the right key, the answer, ever be caught again in all that maze and seeming confusion of piteous, wailing discords? She was literally worked up to such a state of excitement, that she could scarcely sit still; and then he finished, leaving off, after all, with a long, drawn-out, quivering note of stifled anguish, and not the promised concord which the ear was strained to catch;—and there was a clash, too, as of many instruments; but through all, that low, tremulous wail, dying at last into a mere whisper. She could bear it no longer. She covered her face with both hands, and sobbed; but only for a moment, for he had put down his violin, and was looking at her.

"It is dreadful! No wonder you call it 'haunting'! How could you think of such a miserable thing as that ending?"

"Do you like the first part—the melody?"

"Yes; it is beautiful—too beautiful! And then it is all true; and that's what makes it so terrible!"

"True!—true to *you*, Janet! What should you know of such feelings—you, a young girl, with hope and life all before

you? I hardly expected you to understand the ending. I am surprised."

"Why?"

"Well, perhaps it is only natural to your peculiar temperament to be susceptible to all emotions of sadness. Every cry of sorrow finds its way to your heart, I suspect, Janet."

And then he stopped short, with a sigh; and for a few moments his eyes were bent on her, with a questioning, troubled look, which, from being eager, gradually faded away into quiet sadness; and then he turned away, and drew a few notes in quite another strain. It was an air Janet knew well; but it took a new meaning under his hand, and on this instrument. She sat with her back to him, pretending to work, and made no remark, even when, after playing several things, he said,—

"There, never say I don't play to you again!" alluding to a remark she had made once, after his having taken his violin to the Spencers, at Agnes's request. "I think you are fond of music?" he said, presently, standing close behind her chair. But Janet could not manage to make even an ordinary answer; she kept her head down, turning about her bit of sewing nervously. "I want you to practise a little more," he said. "You will never regret it, I think; and when once a certain mastery over the instrument is obtained, it is not easily lost, comparatively. You won't be 'giving up' music, as so many ladies do—why, I never can make out, though I always suspect it is because they don't really care for it. But in your case I fancy you will have every inducement to keep it up."

"How?—as a governess?"

"Don't talk so, Janet! They say it often goes by con-

traries, and that one seldom meets man and wife both musical; yet when it is so, what a fund of pleasure they have. It must make them independent of the world indeed!"

Janet's colour mounted high, and she felt so shy and uncomfortable, and so miserable too, that it was rather a relief when Miss Russell came in, and broke up the tête-à-tête—a thing always now giving her more pain than pleasure, and yet longed for, if any time passed without one.

After a little time, the silence only broken by one or two ordinary remarks from Miss Russell, Mr. Russell said, "You won't come out, then, this evening, Janet, I suppose?"—coming from the window where he had been standing.

"What, now! It is near tea-time, Jacob," Miss Russell remarked, before Janet could utter a word, though she looked strangely eager.

"Quite half an hour—time for a short turn; and I thought Janet looked weary, and as if the air would refresh her. But, perhaps, it is wiser not." And he moved on towards the door, yet with a lingering and regretful look at Janet, which she did not see. She was vexed at his adding the objection. She longed in her heart to run up for her bonnet; but his last words roused her pride, and she sat erect and busy, her needle passing in and out swiftly. "Well, good-bye, then!" he said, almost sadly. Janet's face burnt and her pulses beat quick with vexation; her lips were tightly pressed together, and not opened to return his "Good-bye." Again the door opened, and Mr. Russell looked in to say, "Don't wait tea for me; I may probably go to the Vicarage."

Miss Russell's angry grunt was fully echoed in Janet's heart. She could have found it in her to agree with Miss

Russell that the Grants were odious, and she wished them anywhere but at Old Wareham. She broke her thread, bent her needle, and finally discovered she had sewn her seam the wrong side!

It was not a lively evening. It was unusual now to be alone for so long, and the usual guests were missed, while Mr. Russell's absence added to the flatness. Miss Russell grumbled at the butter and the bread, and scolded Betty till tears came. Anna was sharp and noisy, describing some indignity inflicted on Mr. Lewis, and all the checks and insults he had to bear; but she talked herself happy, expatiating on his magnanimity and high, gentleman-like bearing to Janet, and enlarging on the subject of his opinion on things in general.

Late in the evening, just when they were looking for the master's knock, and ready for prayers, another ring and knock came—not the master's. It was George Spencer, who could not, he said, resist just peeping in, and saying "Good-night," as he passed, having, like a good brother, gone to fetch some of Agnes's music.

The Miss Russells gave him a warm reception; but Janet was stiff and shy. He saw it, and lingered on, in spite of hints that Agnes would expect her music, unwilling to go till he had dispelled the cloud, which sometimes he had found he could do.

Mr. Russell came in while he was there, when he hurried off, with a reproach in his glance at Janet, which Mr. Russell caught. Janet knew that he saw it, and coloured up, as if reproved. She tried to avoid any special "Good-night," by having her hands full; but he was not to be so cheated. He deliberately took her load from her, and placed it on the

table; then, holding out both hands, he waited, saying nothing. "Good-night!" she whispered, giving him one hand, which was immediately folded into both his. "Good-night!" he answered in his own peculiar way; then, hesitating, but quickly overcoming it, he drew her nearer, and kissed her forehead.

Janet's pillow was wet that night, and her eyes somewhat swollen and red the next morning. She tried to repeat to herself that Mr. Russell was too shy to show his feelings, but that he wished to be kind and fatherly, and evidently approved of George Spencer's proposal. She said to herself, she did not wish to be married; she was too young yet. She wished to remain as she was; yet, on any outbreak of temper from Miss Russell, or extra irritation from Miss Anna, she reverted to the governess scheme, and thereupon it would occur to her, as a question, if marriage with one like George Spencer was not preferable? There was much to be said in its favour in her circumstances; but—— Ah! her cogitations always ended in that "but."

George dreaded risking anything by a premature desire for certainty. He was very happy on the whole, and, to his mother's wonder, not tired of Wareham—a thing without precedent in his life. But affairs must be attended to, neither can life afford to take a quiet nap, waiting for lovers. Mrs. Spencer's comfort for the next twelve months depended on her making up her mind whether she was to take a certain house in Bath, as proposed before. There had lately arisen an idea about continuing at Wareham, since George had given up his dislike to the place.

Mrs. Spencer, in her perplexity, spoke to Mr. Russell, in her gentle but anxious way, appealing to him, as Janet's

guardian, whether ample time had not been allowed for the young folks to understand one another, and if it was not desirable for them to be engaged certainly? If so, she ventured to hope Mr. Russell and his sisters would not object to a speedy marriage. Mrs. Spencer had a horror of long engagements, and in this case there was no reason for one. She hoped Mr. Russell would use his influence with his ward to induce her to make George happy as soon as possible. She spoke of her son's sincere attachment, and her own satisfaction in the prospect of his being so early settled—a thing she had always desired, but began to despair of. Marriage would improve George, and bring his good points into play, she said. Indeed, already she discerned an improvement; he was growing more manly, more thoughtful for others, steadier altogether.

Mr. Russell agreed to this; but he showed so much embarrassment, that it raised decided notions in Mrs. Spencer that Mrs. Mitchell was a true prophet, and that he was smitten (as how could he help it?) with the pretty Agnes. Mrs. Spencer had before settled that it would not be a thing to despise. She really liked Mr. Russell very much, and he was reputed very rich. Mrs. Spencer was not worldly, or she would not have so easily consented to receive Janet into the family; but she had lived long enough in the world to know money to be a comfortable thing, when it was accompanied with other advantages. She even went a little out of her usual course this morning in trying to prepare and smooth the way for Mr. Russell, in case his shyness and reserve prevented his speaking. But he did not take the hint. He very gravely promised to speak himself to Janet, doing it with an earnest solemnity rather alarming to Mrs. Spencer. "But he is a very conscientious, good man, and takes everything so earnestly," she observed, as she related this to Eleanor.

CHAPTER V.

A CONFERENCE.

"JANET! when can I speak to you?" asked Mr. Russell the next morning.

"Speak to me?"

"Yes, to you, and alone. Shall you be walking early in the evening? Or can you give me a quarter of an hour at four?"

Janet felt a little shiver of dread, but agreed to hold herself disengaged at that hour.

She had to tell George of the appointment, as he came to ask her to drive with his mother. Probably he guessed the reason for Mr. Russell's request, as he submitted with good grace, only saying she would certainly see him after tea. He felt curious, he added, not to say envious, of the tête-à-tête, and he should go home and tease his sister Agnes about it.

Mr. Russell was very punctual, and as his sister was in the common parlour, he beckoned to Janet to come to the drawing-room. Very chill and formal was its aspect, as he opened the shutters partly, and the light fell sharply athwart furniture covered in brown holland, and fire-irons wrapped in brown paper;—the rug rolled back, and other thrifty con-

trivances which, in those days, the "best" room was submitted to, destined to show its glories about four or five times a year!

Janet had no very pleasant association with the room. It was here she had been often summoned when Mr. Russell had been called in to use the force of his authority in her fits of rebellion. It was here she had learnt to know the meaning of that one look in his eyes which she never disregarded.

The Mr. Russell of this room was, in those days, a very different person from Mr. Russell anywhere else. So strong is the force of early associations, that, perhaps, to the end of her life, Janet would connect a half-closed room, swathed in covers, with a feeling of awe and dread. Yet the recollection was not wholly and unmitigated pain; mixed with the fear was a dash of strange pleasure, which she never could explain otherwise than by saying to Betty, that she liked being afraid of "the master."

There had been fascination in the unwonted, gentle sternness (if one may so call it) which made her heart beat and her cheeks pale. All this had, however, long since passed away with her childhood, and in recalling it, she wondered if it was only her own perverse wilfulness that had called it up, or if he ever showed it to others?

Mr. Russell drew forward a chair, and begged her to be seated. Was it the shadow or her fancy?—he looked so pale and resolved, even stern—reminding her of the old judgment visits in this room. He continued to stand, and she observed that his hand shook a little as he placed it on the table, and then removed it, as if he also had seen it.

"Janet!" and then some huskiness seemed to check his

words, and he cleared his throat more than once. Even then it was not quite his usual voice.

"Janet! I am requested—standing as I do to you, in the light of a guardian, or parent—requested to—to—sound, and ascertain your mind. Mrs. Spencer is uneasy and anxious. She—all of them, they wish for certainty. She is very anxious."

"Is she?"

"Very naturally so, I think. It is now some time, so I understand, and long enough for you young people to know your minds. They do not wish to distress or annoy you; but don't you think you can give an answer now? You are, I believe, not actually engaged yet?"

"No, not engaged at all," she rejoined eagerly.

"Mr. Spencer is very good and patient," he observed with a little smile. "But we must not try him too much. You see their plans depend on the next move."

"Did he—was it Mr. Spencer who told you—asked you, I mean, to question me?"

"His mother. No;—I suspect he would prefer appealing to yourself. He and I have had no conversation on—on—this subject. I am unobservant, too, and, really, but for being told, I don't know that I should have surmised anything. But now Mrs. Spencer has begged me to use my influence to induce you not to delay—even to consent——"

Here he paused, looking intently at her, as she sat bending before him, her eyes fixed on the carpet.

Her attitude was hardly expressive of happiness, or even the shy trembling pleasure natural to the circumstance and her age. It was drooping; and instead of blushes, her cheeks were quite pale, and the lips were drawn tight as if in

strong resolve to meet something painful. As he gazed, his own face worked, and his eyes became dim, though in their soft depths some eager anxious flashes might be seen. Had she looked up then, she must have felt what her heart often craved to know;—that look might have changed the course of her life. But she did not look up and did not see. As he paused in his sentence, she only sighed, not attempting to help him on by a suggestion or a glance.

"My sisters say this is a very happy and desirable offer," he presently said, hurriedly; "and so it is, I dare say. They are nice, good, pleasant people—the young man all that can be desired—winning and loveable, frank and honourable. Yes," he went on with increased ease and warmth, "all in his favour. They are all fond of you, too—appreciate and do you justice. I feel sure of this, or I would not have consented to have anything to do with it. I consider it unnecessary to consult any one—your poor father or your step-mother—under the circumstances. You decide for yourself, of course. And we must see after your interest; though, from what the mother said, he will be liberal as to settlements, and you will not go to him as an utterly portionless bride either. Something is ready for you on the day, and something more will, please God, come to you at my death."

At this she looked up quickly,—a troubled flashing glance. "No, no! don't say that. I will take nothing—nothing! If he can't marry me as I am—a—a beggar—an outcast, but for your charity—a governess, or, perhaps, servant—as I should be, if—if—— If, I say, he can't take me so, then let him leave me!"

"My dear! it is not for him, or on his account! He would not care. It is because I choose to provide for my—

my—— Why! you are one of us; a child of the house, Janet! Could we allow her to leave us penniless? It will be hard enough to lose you; let me have the slight gratification proper to my calling, as a trader, to provide for you. You will be very comfortable, I think. He has a good property, and——"

"What is the use of that to me?"

"O, you will find its use. Not that it is indispensable, but only a pleasant adjunct, if all other important points are right and proper."

She looked proud now, and raised her head. "Do you like him, Mr. Russell?"

"Like George Spencer? You know what I first thought of him, and all I owe him, and our pleasant acquaintance has not disappointed me. Yes, I do truly like him, and each one of the family. One can so much better judge of a man by seeing him in his own family. In this you are fortunate, Janet. How many only see their future husbands among strangers! Now, let me—may I?—congratulate you." And he took her hand; but she pulled it away, and covering her face with it, burst into tears.

He was distressed, stroked her hair, and spoke kind and gentle words in praise of George Spencer, explaining why Mrs. Spencer was eager to have it so far settled that she might form her plans.

"Have you not had time enough, my dear? Do you think you shall know him more by waiting longer?"

"What do you wish me to say—to do?" she said.

"Whatever you feel to like yourself. None can guide you here, Janet. I have, and so has my sister, she tells me, pointed out the advantages, and objections there seem to

be none. We can do no more, but pray for God's choicest blessings on your decision, whatever it be. Can't you bring yourself to answer him even this night? You need not tell me, but tell him. I only fulfil my mission in repeating Mrs. Spencer's wish for your answer."

"Thank you! Yes—of course it must be—thank you!"

"Don't thank me for nothing; it sounds so formal, and a little angry. You are not angry, I hope, Janet, at my touching on this delicate matter?"

"No, indeed! O, no! How could I be so? Did I seem angry—and with you? But what shall I say—what ought I to say, I wonder—to him?"

"My dear!" and he looked surprised and puzzled. "Can't you confide in me—that is, if—supposing you have any doubts. Treat me as a true friend, Janet—let us say—well, a brother; an elder brother, as being less formal than guardian."

"Brother!" she repeated, looking eagerly at him.

"Yes, a brother! or do you think me too old?"

Was he thinking of Agnes? she asked herself, as she repeated the word. And she decided that he was; and this idea was further confirmed by his presently looking rather conscious and troubled, his lips trembling, and, as she fancied, in that doubtful light, even his colour changing. Some strong feeling was working, she saw; and how cold his hand was, as he laid it on hers and tried to speak, but could not, till after one or two efforts.

"Janet, they tell me you are attached to this young man, and—yes, and I believe he is truly and honestly attached to you, and is worthy—almost worthy of you; for, you see, I can't help being perhaps a little partial. My ideas about

you are—— But this is not to the purpose! I would say—if you have any—any doubt, or hesitation, or need any sympathy or help which I can give, surely you will trust me? Speak now, Janet. Confide in me. God knows my desire to help you, child! You like him—like Mr. Spencer, don't you?"

"Yes—yes, I do."

"And you feel you know him well? His nature is an open and frank one—not difficult to read."

"Yes, I know and understand him."

"Then you will consent? And long engagements are undesirable, Janet; Mrs. Spencer is anxious for a speedy marriage."

"As you and they like," she answered, quietly.

"Now then, dear child, I need no longer keep you here in this cheerless room. Shall I, or will you speak? Or will Mr. Spencer himself come for his answer, think you?"

"No, I think not. Please will you—tell him—— anything you like. I don't want him to begin it all again; let it go on quietly and smoothly. Will you tell him?" and she looked up wistfully.

"If you prefer it——"

"I don't prefer anything. I don't care either!" she said with a sudden burst of impatience. "I wish I had never seen him—wish he had never come here!"

"Good God! Janet, what do you mean? Is it possible I am mistaken? Has any one urged you unduly? Are you not acting freely, unforced by any one? Surely no one is forcing you against your will?" and he looked at her as if wishing to read her heart.

"No!" she answered, with a scornful smile; "that would

not be easy! But I don't feel so very deeply *in love* with Mr. Spencer, and I told him so! I warned him I did not and could not return his feelings evenly."

"Indeed! and why? Do you dislike him?"

"On the contrary, I like him much, and admire him. But—— well, he is so very young!" she added, impatiently.

"Is that a fault, do you think?" he said, with a smile just touching his lips; "you will love him better *and better*, my dear; don't you think so? and you know he will grow older, too. Janet! Janet! tell me—that is, if you will. It is, of course, a good and advantageous marriage; yet, unless your heart is in it, what avails all? You alarm me! For God's sake, speak! Is there any impediment, any—— Can it be——"

"No, nothing—that is if, as he says, he is content with me and my quiet regard. If I say so, I shall do my best to please him."

"No doubt! Yet—but he is so winning, and attractive, and handsome, pleasant—you must like him—just the person, it seems to me, to win love! You will—you do, and will more and more feel this! Yet," he added, as he looked at her, and something in her face struck him, "can it—could it—Janet!" He put his hand to his forehead, and took a few rapid turns to and fro in the room, moved and agitated beyond hiding or immediate control. "Janet"—and again he stopped before her, and gravely, and yet in an eager vehement way, new to him, seemed to search her countenance again, till her eyes fell beneath his look, and she felt strangely moved and excited. She could not bear it! She must leave him!

"You are troubled," he said. You—you—speak, Janet!

No! Forgive me! I don't mean that;" and again he walked up and down.

When next he stopped and spoke, his aspect and his tone of voice were changed. In his usual gentle and calm way he said—

"You are sure, quite sure, that you like him, and wish to marry him? You must know, child, that this is to me a responsibility, and, pardon me, if in my desire to understand you I seem too vehement."

"I have been doubtful," Janet said, only noticing his question; "but there are many reasons in favour of it."

"Yes, many, many! We shall not so wholly lose you, as we might have done; and, while we do justice to his merits, we must not forget his sister, whose friendship and regard for you is my delight and my pride."

"Yes—O yes. Let it be settled; the sooner the better!" Janet impatiently put in.

"You won't regret this—this hurrying you? You have quite made up your mind?"

"Yes—no—I am ready, I mean. Oh! I can't express it. I am tired, I believe. Let it be settled, please, Mr. Russell," and she leaned her head on her hands, stooping, with her elbows on the table.

"Rest now; I have tired you. Rest, that you may be well for the evening! God bless you."

He bent as if about to kiss her, but did not do so; only lifting one or two stray long hairs with gentle and almost reverent care, he put them back in their place, then turned to leave the room. But Anna came in, curiosity and surprise on her face, and full of projects and news, which Janet happily escaped for the present, by Mr. Russell's volunteering

to hear her, and remaining in the dark dismal room for the purpose.

Janet was surprised to find that Mr. Russell was gone to bed with a headache, when she went to the parlour for tea. Nor did Mr. Spencer appear, but a tiny note of excuse instead, explaining that a friend had arrived from Exeter, and could not be left. Perhaps it was as well, and Janet had the night to sleep on her tacit promise, and make sure of her own mind.

When next George saw Janet, he thanked her for the concession which he understood she had made; it gave great pleasure to all parties. He proposed leaving all further arrangements and preparations to the old and wise heads. The only stipulation he made was that his bride should wear a veil, and that his particular friend, Sir John Cushatt, should be invited. He begged her acceptance of a valuable diamond ring, and also put another on her finger then, as a kind of betrothal; it was made after the old device of forget-me-nots in a wreath.

Anna was loud in praise of his exquisite taste: Miss Russell thought it waste of money; but, perhaps, excusable in so young a man.

A great change came over Janet from this hour. Instead of the languor and indifference which had weighed her down, she became full of energy and life. From sitting still and unoccupied, gazing on the carpet, she changed to "perpetual motion," as George called it. Instead of her voice being seldom heard in the family circle, she was now the greatest talker. Her laugh was frequent and merry. She showed quite a new phase, and George thought there was no end of her attractions. He was more in love than ever.

Her sallies of fun delighted him, and she was up to every proposition of pleasure. No walk was too long, no doubtful cliff path too hazardous for a scramble. She climbed every hedge, however high or thorny, for blossoms and berries, and only laughed at a rent or a scratch. She turned everything into a joke, and surprised George by her powers of acting and mimicry.

"What a strange girl you are!" said Agnes one day, after she and George had fairly tired themselves with laughing at her taking off the Mitchells. "Can you guess this to be the demure, shy, Quaker, romantic Janet Nairn, to whom I introduced you, that memorable day in the lane?"

"Like the Syren of the Nile, she is made of infinite variety, but is herself in all," returned he. "But enough now, Janet! you are quite pale, and five minutes ago you had such a colour! Don't excite yourself—take it easy, do! Here, give me some paper, and a good pen, and tell me what to say to the man about the carriage. Shall it be claret or blue?"

She gave him the paper, and upon Agnes saying she must go out for some shopping, Janet declared she must go too. She was tired of the room, it was close and dusty. She only laughed at George's entreating for her to wait till his letter was finished. She said he might follow them, and kissing her hand, she looked so pretty as she left him, that he could not be vexed. But whether by chance or on purpose, it so happened she was seldom or never alone with him now. Musing, with his pen suspended, being one of those unfortunate beings to whom a letter is a formidable business, he remembered that amid all the amusement and delight her new gaiety gave him, she always avoided and repelled any

demonstration of affection. She showed great dislike to her marriage being alluded to, and had been excited to tears at receiving a present from Miss Rose. Agnes said it was very natural. This led him to think how fortunate it was that she and Agnes were such good friends. He was very fond of his sister, and would have been unhappy had his wife not suited her. He went on to wonder if Mr. Russell really meant anything or not. He did not much care, he had rather keep Aggie as she was. Russell would be rather awful as a brother-in-law. The letter was still further delayed by the verification of that old saying, which is more true than proper, by the object of his thoughts appearing.

"I am glad to find you, Spencer," said Mr. Russell; "I want your attention to a little business."

The result of the "business" was, that when the two gentlemen joined the shopping ladies, George emphatically declared to Janet that her guardian was a regular "brick," and as liberal a fellow as ever breathed. To which remark she made no answer.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUARDIAN'S GIFT.

PREPARATIONS for the wedding now went on apace. The Miss Russells, each in her own particular way, were busy. A workwoman was hired, and afforded so much excuse for directions, lectures on economy, and diligence and unremitting surveillance, that during the little leisure time Miss Russell had for the family party, she was unusually silent and urbane.

Anna was up to the elbows in gilt paper, pasteboard, and paste; and, in addition to her usual work, she was bent on the manufacture of a wreath made of rice paper. It was to represent double roses; and she tried hard to persuade everyone it would be less common and far prettier for the bride than orange blossoms, either real or artificial. It would be "unique." Agnes laughed, and humoured the idea, so far as to beg for a duplicate for herself; but George began to take alarm, and privately informed Agnes that she must manage to procure a right one and make some excuse, so as to avoid offending the lady; at which Agnes only looked saucy and mysterious, and even assured him that it was Janet's duty to wear Anna's handywork. Then he appealed to Janet herself,

but she coloured up, and looked annoyed, and said, "she wished people would not be so busy, but leave her dress alone!"

George Spencer was very much occupied himself, and had to be away for a few days.

As to Mr. Russell, he kept quite aloof—frightened by millinery, Agnes declared; but he alleged a press of business and more troubles with the Spanish house. He found time one day to pay his friends at the Rectory a visit.

Mrs. Grant was alone. She spoke of the fine weather, of course, and of the full and gay season it had been at Wareham: then asked how the courtship went on, and how soon would the wedding take place.

"Very soon," was the reply; "there is no use in delay; I hope it is likely to be a happy marriage."

"Why, I can almost detect a shade of doubt in your voice! Is that possible, Mr. Russell? We hoped it was a thing entirely to your satisfaction. A very good match, as the saying is, for her, surely, and we hear excellent accounts of the family."

Mr. Russell did not raise his eyes as he answered gravely, "I don't much understand these matters. I like the young man much, and the whole family; but I should like to see her—the lady—a little brighter. She is very quiet!"

"Ah! well, I don't like her the less for that. Don't you think it is natural for a young person of any great feeling to be quiet—to stand in awe at the great change, the deep responsibility she undertakes? It is less common, but O, far better than light-hearted merriment—at such a time."

"But this quiet is intermittent, alternating with almost wild fits of merriment. Janet is one to feel very deeply!

She is not an ordinary character by any means. I hope he understands her, and that it is all right. But I am going to ask you to do me a favour. I know nothing about such matters, but I wish to make her a suitable present. Can you help me?"

"Willingly. Is it to be an ornament, or a book, or furniture, or plate——"

"What a list! Furniture and plate she will have in abundance; a book I have already chosen for her. An ornament, I suppose; but what?"

"What do you say to a watch? Or has she one—or is it too expensive?"

"That will be the very thing; a neat watch. It will constantly be near her. Will you give me the benefit of your taste and judgment in choosing one? and if this is not sufficient I will give you more."

"Quite enough; it will get watch and chain, both. And now, Mr. Russell, as an old sincere friend, excuse my taking a liberty, and saying with what pleasure we have heard of another report. I hear there will be a double connexion between the two families, and Mr. Grant and I have rejoiced!"

"My dear friend,—there is no other Mr. Spencer for Anna!"

"No, but there is a Miss Spencer for Mr. Russell!"

"I solemnly assure you there is no truth in it. I never entertained such a thought! and it is a poor return for the pretty young creature's kindness to a musty old bachelor to talk so of her. Pray, Mrs. Grant, contradict it whenever you can. That could never be;—I shall never marry!"

He spoke gravely, but Mrs. Grant laughed; and as he shook her hand heartily, she said she hoped he would think

otherwise. Even if this report was unfounded, she hoped, as his friend, that the time would come, when his friends might congratulate him.

"Another parcel for you, Miss Janet," said Betty, one evening. "The office boy left 'un without message; see, 'tis uncommon like master's writing, ain't it?"

Betty was a privileged person. She waited to see Janet take off the covering, with full as much expectation and pleasure as if she were the receiver.

A neat morocco case, and within, on the rich ruby velvet, lay a tiny enamelled watch, with its shining golden chain coiled round and round.

A bright flashing smile would have repaid the giver could he have seen it. That was the genial expression of the young girl's pleasure, in possessing her first watch!

But even as the smile died away, the lips began to work and quiver, with another feeling than pleasure. She shook her head as she replaced the pretty jewel; but, on Betty's holding up a note which had dropped with the cover, there was again a passing flush on her cheek, and in her eyes a light which might be compared to summer lightning quivering in the evening sky. One or two large tears dropped on the round bold handwriting as she read these words—

"Let this little watch remind my dear Janet of her ever faithful and loving friend,

"J. Russell."

"Oh, Betty," she presently exclaimed, pacing up and down the room and crumpling the paper in her agitation; "Oh, Betty, it is all very well to say and believe it is all right, but no one in the whole world can be more miserable than I am!"

"My dear Miss Janet, don't 'ee go for to say that there!"

"Isn't there cause for it, if I am to be married to a person I don't love? Tell me that!"

Betty felt alarmed at her hurried, wild looks and flushed face.

"Not love that nice young gentleman? Oh, miss! Sure, and you're just put out a bit, and tired. Do 'ee lie down, my dear."

"Betty, I cannot marry Mr. Spencer!"

"Oh, good now, you'll think other to-morrow. Oh, Miss Janet, he's so fond of you! Many's the time I've seen 'un, when he thought no one wasn't looking; he watches for your smiles as sailors watch for fair wind. I think, my dear, if you wasn't so put about, you see, you must love him, and couldn't help it. One can't love all to once I know, but you're young and he's young, and it will come. No harm if you can't be quite so eager as he, you'll not make the worse wife for that. I have heard, 'tis best to begin with less and come to more; but, good lack! the gentry have funny ways, and do always be so hurrisome, I deem there's no time for knowing one's mind; and that's how 'tis with you this minute, Miss Janet. Don't be afeard, you'll love him, I war'n'!"

"Look there!" interrupted Janet quickly, and in tremulous excitement; "do you see that glass of water? It is full. Can it hold any more?"

And then she began walking quickly to and fro the room again, holding one hand pressed against her side, while with the other she pushed aside her fallen hair, with no gentle touch.

Such fire shone in her eyes, such determination was in her tread, while round the quivering mouth you might read traces of sensibility and all the softness of love.

Betty looked perplexed and sighed, wondering what the glass of water had to do with it. Then, as if a new light struck her, she hastily threw out the water, and refilling it from the water bottle, offered it to the excited girl.

"Take sup, dear, do!"

"Oh, Betty!" she said, stopping short, and looking so wistfully at her that Betty's eyes filled; "Oh, Betty, what shall I do! Is it right to marry without love? Is it doing justice to Mr. Spencer? But I have told them. Yesterday I said the truth to Miss Russell, and she looked so severe, and said it was too late now, and I was bound by every feeling of truth and honour to go on. She said it was my nonsense, and that the love I spoke of was only fit for romances: it did not belong to real life.—I wonder if it is true!" she added, continuing her walk, but more quietly, and speaking in a musing way to herself. "No! No! it is false! and I am a base worldly cowardly wretch! Does he love me? Yes, after a manner—as much as he knows how. Betty, do advise me—I am very desolate!"

"As to being desolate, my dear, no doubt you do feel so; most folks do some time or another. There be thoughts we can't none of us tell to they that be nearest and dearest; but there's One above don't need no words, miss."

"True, you always feel that, but I don't. It is my own fault. I worship idols, and lose that comfort. But promise me, Betty, promise me solemnly, that you will never speak of—never, in fact, think of what I have said. Forget I have ever said such things."

"I will promise never to speak of it, and when it comes into my thoughts, I'll remember it in prayer, like, and then I hope, no harm will come of it. God help you, my dear young lady. It is just edifying to see the dealings of Providence. He sends trouble for fear too much riches will hurt us. All so fair as this grand marriage is, and folks telling of the good luck, and then you to be so cast down. Good now, it is all for the best."

"Good night, you good dear old soul," said Janet, huggin her and kissing her red smooth cheeks.

CHAPTER VII.

A LAST ATTEMPT.

The time drew very near; but there was a pause in the busy bustle of preparation, for the day had been altered. This little delay was occasioned by the illness of a friend of Sir John Cushatt.

It mattered but little, since at George's particular request there was to be no party. The Mitchells, as the only relatives of the Russells, and Miss Rose, as the Spencers' friend, Mr. Lewis, and the Rector and Rectoress only, were invited. Out of the fulness of their goodnature, the Mitchells had promised flowers, to any amount, for bouquets and to ornament the table.

Perhaps the quiet was not unacceptable to any one; Agnes said she rejoiced in it, it gave her a chance of not looking like a death's head at a feast; "working hard," she protested, "always made her look a fright." When they asked what hard work had wrought such mischief, she could not remember exactly what she had done; but there were cards to be sent and directed, and thinking of it was as bad as the doing; and, in fact, they might laugh, but it was very tiring, exhausting work, thinking of a wedding!

Perhaps Janet thought so too, for she had gone back to the old pale and quiet gravity which had struck Mr. Russell.

George had been absent for a day and night. When he returned he found Janet alone in the sitting-room, at work. He drew his chair beside, but a little behind her, where he could watch the progress of a purse, in the fabrication of which he was interested, as he had helped to choose the pattern and colour, and it was intended as a present to no less a personage than Mr. Lewis.

"Are you tired?" said Janet, after a long silence, and on hearing something very like a suppressed yawn.

"Why, yes! It was confoundedly hot yesterday, and you women, how you do run up a list of commissions! Aggie alone sent me to a dozen shops."

He rose to take up a newspaper as he spoke.

"Mr. Spencer! I wish very much to speak to you," Janet said, in a hurried manner, without looking up at all.

Mr. Spencer raised his eyebrows in considerable surprise. "What does it mean? Mr. Spencer will never more hear what Janet Nairn has to say," he added, with perfect gravity.

She threw one of her quick looks at him, and then colouring a little said—

"Do, George, hear me! I must speak to you."

"When am I not ready to hear you?" Then changing his voice again to half play, mingled with consideration, he added, "Well, Janet, what is it? I am all attention."

He threw the paper down, and put his arm round the back of her chair. She drew more than one long sigh, and her complexion varied with every breath, while her head bent down lower and lower. It seemed impossible for her to speak.

"Come! are you trying my curiosity?" he said, presently, playing with the one little curl which would always escape and lay temptingly at the back of her slender neck.

"Oh, Mr. Spencer! ——"

"What, again? What does it mean, Miss Nairn?"

"Oh, never mind! Be serious, George, I beg. But has it never—does it never—strike you that—that I—that my love is not what it ought to be?"

Pausing for breath, she let her work drop in her lap, and her fingers were immediately interlaced, after a habit of hers when putting extra constraint on herself.

"I told you once before—long ago—that I could never—never return your love. You would go on. Things have been urged to this solemn crisis, and no one will heed me!"

There was a pathos—an appealing gentleness in the rich modulations of her at all times sweet voice, which charmed him. It was like music to his ear. Little heeding the purport of her speech, but drinking in the pleasant sounds, while his eye was equally delighted with the curve of her throat and the set of the well-shaped head with its numberless coils of silken hair, he was too engrossed to speak.

Finding this, she went on—"I thought if you were content with such poor cold love, I might do my duty faithfully, and that it was, of course, only too good a fortune for me; every one says so, and truly. For what is the alternative? When I expressed a doubt as to my being right, every one stopped me, and called it 'romantic' and 'high-flown;' and —and I was flattered, I suppose, at your liking me (here she felt a little pull at her curl), and it did seem pleasanter then, than living on here or being a governess."

"Oh! you do me that honour, do you?" he interrupted,

bending his head round to catch her eye, but in vain, her eye was not raised.

"But have I any right to do this? And then mine is not an easy, gentle temper. I always go in extremes. I can't love a little; it must be much or——"

"And let it be much, Janet," he said, pressing his hand on her shoulder.

"I can't—I can't!—that's it! Oh, I can't," she said, in a low, frightened, but emphatic voice.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "I have not half heard you, I believe. Not love me, Janet!" and he tried to draw her round to him. "Not love me! Look into my eyes and say so if you dare," he added, playfully touching her chin, and drawing her face to him. But what he saw there banished his smile in a moment. Changing his tone, he took one of her hands in his, and in an earnest manner said, "What is it, Janet?"

"Simply what I said—what I say—if you will but believe me now before it is too late."

"It is hard to believe that you don't love me, Janet," he said. "Do you hate me?"

"Not now."

"Not now, or ever. No, I am not afraid of that. I am no tyrant or domestic bugbear; it is not my way to bore people, and make them and myself miserable with base suspicions. I don't think I am such a very selfish spooney but that my wife may be happy. I have been tolerably liked by women all my life—mother, sisters, aunts, and cousins—and I always hold it to be a man's fault when conjugal quarrels arise. Contrary to the general opinion, which lays the blame on the wife, I hold that any man who

is kind and attentive to his wife, as he should be, will bind her to him. Come, shall I give you a concise essay on my views of a husband's duty? Little Janet! you are raising spectres which, believe me, will vanish when once you possess the talisman, in the shape of a gold ring. Does not this pure blue stone shame your morbid fancies? This ring was a pledge of as true and honest a love as any woman ever won." His tone became very earnest: "Don't you believe that I love you, Janet?"

"Yes—as far as your nature allows. Indeed I do!"

"My nature allows! What does the girl mean? Wherein is my nature so different from others, I wonder! Never mind, you shall see how much is allowed by my 'nature.' Ten years hence I will ask, and you shall answer that question. Oh, Janet," he presently said, "you tried to frighten me, did you? You wished to stir me up, not finding me sentimental enough, I suppose. Is it that I have never fallen on my knees, and vowed—I don't know what; or praised the beauty of your eyes and lips, and so forth, according to romance laws, that you now come down upon me with such gloomy ideas, hey? And you don't love me, don't you? Whom then do you love, Janet? Who is there? By the way, I say, Janet! look at me! Is there any rival in the case? I never thought about such a possibility, such a young thing as you are—but by Jove, I do believe——why you blush! Come, confess this moment. Out with it!"

"Oh, don't—don't joke about it!" she exclaimed, distressed, and wringing her disengaged hand.

"Well, joking apart—seriously, Janet, I begin to be jealous, only I can't conceive who has sprung up all of a sudden to take my place. Is it Mr. Lewis?"

"Oh, never mind that," she said impatiently. "But, George, do believe me, and break it off. It is best for you to do so."

"For me;—umph! Well—and for you?—leave you to the Miss Russells' tender mercies, or to the enviable fate of a governess?"

"Never mind, anything but to be untrue—base. I don't deserve your affection."

"Oh, now you come to that, I know what you are at. That is of course. And I don't deserve yours. We won't trouble ourselves with calculating our deserts, Janet. But—mind, I speak seriously"—and she felt that he did—"there is no happiness for me without you. Mine is no common, idle fancy. I have had such before. This is my first, my only real love. Oh, Janet, never again talk of breaking it off!"

His face was pale, and there was an unmistakable earnestness in his voice.

"The fact is I have been too careless, afraid of annoying you, and have avoided the subject. I have been very remiss as a lover, I will be a better husband, Janet!"

His kind and honest manner touched her. Tears came into her eyes. What could she do? was the inward cry of her heart. Go on as the wind blew, trusting to time, which changes all things, to bring her safely through life—wedded life? And yet—the beating of her pulses, the thrill which even then shook her, seemed to tell another tale. She raised her head, and once more something irresistible urged her to speak—to try and undo the chain which she had allowed to bind her.

"Again, I say, it is not right! I warn you, George Spencer, that my nature is not yours—that I don't love you as—as I feel I *can* love. On your responsibility be the con-

sequences, should my hot, passionate nature ever assert its truth, and be too strong for conventional laws. I may, I will try, to be a faithful, good wife; I know I shall always meet with kindness from you. You may perhaps be satisfied—and —and—all may be right for you. God grant it—but——"

"Amen," interrupted George. "No 'but,' dear Janet, let it end there. You are sensitive, excitable, but all will be right, as you say. Trust me to soothe and comfort you. You are mine, mine now beyond recall. It is not in my power to give you up. Be content! I am so."

It needed some of Agnes's kind and sensible cheering before George quite threw off a melancholy impression which this conversation had left on his mind. He was so unused to trouble, that it startled him, and he was only too glad to hear Agnes say, it was just nothing but a little of Janet's bottled-up romance, and the effects of a somewhat morbid temper, engendered by so much early trial, not wisely directed.

"But she was at one time quite thrilling. I assure you it was wonderful to see her—every breath, every movement so full of fire. What an actress she would make, or rather what a study she would be for the great stars! I couldn't make it out, and knew not what to say."

"To tell you the truth, my good brother, I suspect there are depths in her character you have not sounded, and it is best so. She would not be the better for finding such feelings were met and sympathised in. Once launched into quiet, domestic, home-peace and love, and shielded from troubles and petty trials, she will forget those deep hollows herself. She will be content to bask in the sunshine, and she will—will—in fact, she will grow fat and merry!" Agnes laughed

at her own fancy, but George was still reverting to the scene of the morning.

"How beautiful she is, Aggie! I never knew how lovely, how grand she was, till to-day. Upon my word, she rang every change, from gentle pity and love to high tragedy, despair, horror. One would not guess this to see her demure Quaker-dress and manner."

"She a Quaker, George! She comes, more than half of her, from Spain. I have understood her mother was more lovely than steady, and broke her husband's heart, or nearly so. But I never say much to mamma about all this. I dwell on the respectable side. A Manchester solicitor of good old family, from Scotland. All Scots are noble of course in one generation, never mind how far back. Poor mamma believes so much in good or bad 'blood.' I caught her laying great stress on the Scotch origin and the name 'Janet,' one day. Poor mamma! You must own, George, she has been very good and liberal."

"Very! but I do so thoroughly despise that exclusive, proud notion of looking to the grandparents. If Jack or Gill is good and all right, what matter about Jack or Gill's grandmother?"

"Oh, I don't know. The sins of the fathers do come down somehow, George. But there is no reason to fear about Janet's mother's sins coming to her. She is a high-principled creature. Oh, I do believe, George, she will be a good wife for you. How is it you are not there to-night? Afraid of tiring her? Considerate man! Well, I do say, George, you are not a selfish, foolish lover, who bores his lady and every one else. Commend me to such an one! By the way, we are all to go there to-morrow evening."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SOCIAL GATHERING AND SOLITARY THOUGHTS.

Once again was assembled that rather curiously assorted party, which circumstances had drawn together during the summer, and had bound by no common links. So very little as the Russells ever mixed in society, so very limited as their acquaintance was, these lively gatherings were very new to the old room. Chairs, tables, and settees must have felt astonished at the change. There was a decided character about the room, and Miss Russell and Anna, and to a certain extent Jacob too, were in keeping with it;—Anna, whose back never yet made acquaintance with a chair; and Miss Russell, who never overlooked a speck of dust, who was annoyed at a chair being out of place—whose fashion of dress had hardly changed oftener than the arrangement of the curtains.

To see Agnes with her air of fashion in one of the shining, straight, high, respectable horse-hair chairs, looked odd. Mrs. Spencer, being a very little woman, was glad to accept Janet's offer of a footstool, as she tried to look particularly comfortable in a large elbow mahogany seat, which passed in the family for an easy chair, and had always been old Mr.

Russell's seat of honour. George's attempt at lounging in the narrow settee which stood in the window was still more ludicrous. They each and all looked strange in the room; but Janet, whose appearance was picturesque rather than fashionable, fitted well, as she would anywhere. The neat, stiff polish and formal array, the Quaker-drab tint of the painted walls, formed no bad background to her brilliant rich beauty.

They fell into groups at first; though very soon the Spencers' amiability, ease, and spirit drew in the circle as it were, and gay wit and laughter warmed the room. Mrs. Spencer's soft rich silk and delicate lace relieved the rigidity of outline presented by Miss Russell's everlasting brown poplin and highly starched cap; and the earnest kindness and desire to please in the former softened Miss Russell's short answers. She could not quite lay aside the coat of mail, but she tried to be sociable and do honour to her guests. But when she caught sight of Jacob standing with his back to the piano-forte, and talking to the young ones eagerly of music, her forced smile died away, and she began tapping the elbow of her chair with her finger;—a sure sign of irritation. Mrs. Spencer was uncomfortable at this "tap, tap, tap." She took an exploring glance or two at the stern face, and fancied from the working of the mouth that something—what, Mrs. Spencer could not make out—but something, was displeasing Miss Russell.

Now some very amiable people have a way of making a peculiar kind of laugh—I don't know by what other name to give it—an appealing deprecating sound, intended to soften the edges of a mal à propos or hasty speech. It is generally the sign of a timid spirit, dreading arguments, wishing for

peace. It is meant to be conciliating and apologetic. It seems to fill up awkward pauses, and hide any feelings of soreness which a recent thrust may have occasioned. It is very expressive—especially when accompanied by glances so fearful and anxious as Mrs. Spencer threw from time to time at her rather formidable companion. Nevertheless, this said chirp, or cackle, or laugh, or whatever it is, is very disagreeable and peculiarly irritating to some temperaments. It was to Miss Russell. She felt inclined to stare hard, and wonder what Mrs. Spencer was laughing at; or to ask if she had anything the matter with her throat.

The fingers tapped harder and quicker, the lips worked about in a threatening way, when luckily George asked his mother if she had shown her piece of work to Miss Russell. Jumping at this, Mrs. Spencer rose quickly to fetch the basket which she had left in the hall. But George was far too gallant not to do this himself, and also helped her to unroll and display a gorgeous, elaborate piece of tapestry which his mother had just completed, meaning to honour her son and heir with it as a wedding gift.

It was begun ten years ago. George was proud of the patience and perseverance which he wondered at, and he pointed out the skilful arrangement of colour—his "mother's taste," he said.

It was very beautiful, and if ladies must rob upholsterers of their employment this was a good specimen, inasmuch as there was room for taste to be displayed. Mrs. Spencer had drawn and shaded the flowers herself, and arranged the whole group. The centre was a pair of ring-doves, in pale, soft, neutral shades. They were surrounded by a georgeous wreath of brilliantly-tinted flowers, whose tendrils flaunted

in and out and broke the formality. The border was on a dark ground, which gradually shaded away to pearly white for the centre.

"Umph! and what is the use of this?" said Miss Russell, putting away her spectacles, after a careful examination.

"Well, we hardly know whether to make it the back of a chair, or a screen. We have other work which would suit for the seat of a chair."

"A chair!" said Miss Russell, nodding her head and raising her hands. "For the Sybarites, I suppose. Well, what shall we come to at last?"

"My aunt's drawing-room is entirely filled up with such work," said George. "Every cushion, and chair, and screen, are the production of the home frames. She and her sister are always working in wools."

"And can any Christian woman reconcile such work to her conscience! Besides the waste of time, it is helping on the bad fashion of the age. It is very awful to see how things are going on,—to actual ruin! The next generation will be unable to sit up at all, I believe. Such easy chairs and couches and what not! It beats all."

"Well, I own I shouldn't wish my wife to be a professor in Berlin work," said George, laughing; "but for company work it is pretty, and even useful. I know nothing prettier than a heap of these delicate wools neatly arranged; and the frames are quite ornamental pieces of furniture—I like to see a woman bending over them."

"Yes," said Jacob, evidently forming a picture in his mind's eye, "very true! Anna, I think it would be an improvement on the paste and paper, hey?"

"You always have a rap at that, Jacob; but you can't

deny that my little handiworks are elegant, and set off a room."

"Do you really think we are retrograding very fast?" asked George, with a roguish curl of the lip, of Miss Russell.

"No doubt of it. The signs of the times are awful! Luxury and sentimentality go hand in hand. So much morbid indulgence for vice and sin! Young people now-a-days can't bear to be reproved, much less punished. Truth is called harshness and severity. Your sentimentalists and Sybarites and universal benevolence advocates are ruining the land!"

"You would not go back, would you, ma'am, to the old abuses?"

"I would go back to Henry the Eighth or Elizabeth. Vice was vice then, and got punished, without a pack of silly, soft, sentimental creatures raising a cry."

"The good old days—how charming!" said Agnes.

"Very!—I suppose you would like the rush-strewn floors, swept once a year, if that; hey, my fastidious sister? Or to have your head chopped off one fine morning for going to church and getting married?"

"People then did not mince their words and spare the truth," said Miss Russell. "Young ones were kept in their places. People had chairs and tables, but did not crowd their rooms with baby toys, and chatter nonsense about the dignity of man. Solomon's rod was in use then, and sin was chastised instead of flattered!"

"Oh, but popery, remember popery, and all those horrors!" exclaimed Miss Eleanor Spencer.

"Oh, yes, remember the blindness!" chimed in Mr. Lewis.

"Henry the Eighth quarrelled with the Pope, if I remember rightly," said Miss Russell.

"Yes, to be Pope himself," observed Jacob.

"Nonsense, Jacob! I know you think the nineteenth century everything that is good. I believe in my heart you are a secret reformer, or a radical; for all I know, a Chartist. You would be for every man to please himself and have his way—to lie on roses and do nothing; that's your creed!"

"Witness my counting-house! No; not quite so bad as that, I hope," he said, smiling.

Miss Russell became suddenly silent and still. Anna was putting the last stitch to her wedding present, a wonderful pair of card racks, talking fast meanwhile to Mr. Lewis and Miss Spencer. Mr. Lewis had heaved one or two sighs, and looked undecidedly towards the young people round the window; but Miss Spencer was a good listener, and he soon became eloquent on parochial matters.

To see him as he stood between these two ladies, ardent admirers, listening eagerly and drawing him out, was to understand how a well-meaning, amiable, but rather weak man became,—just what he was. As the Rector always said, "Lewis was meant for better things, but tea-parties and old ladies have spoilt him."

In the midst of his discourse Anna's quick ear caught a sound—a word—in her own line, from the window party.—"Riddle! Oh, what riddle, Mr. Spencer?" and out came a splendidly-bound album directly, ready for any choice riddle she should hear.

"Why is the letter D like a ring?" asked George.

"Come, sister, do you hear?" said Anna, putting on a considering face. "Sister approves of riddles, and is very

clever in guessing," she added. "Oh, Mr. Spencer, I wish it was the letter O !"

"Why, Anna ?" said her sister.

"Oh, because they are both circles ! But that is too easy to be clever ; and I am sure this is very clever, from Mr. Spencer's face."

"Because it belongs to a bride ?" suggested Mr. Lewis, timidly.

A general laugh answered him.

"Do you give up ?" said George. "Janet, won't you have a guess ?"

But she only shook her head.

"Because without it we cannot be wed," George said, very gravely, and looking at Janet.

"Without it I cannot be wed ?" repeated Miss Russell, not taking it in.

"Oh ! Miss Russell, I said '*we*,' that makes all the difference."

Great applause followed, and George was entreated to write it himself in the album, and to add the date, which Anna said would add significance to the thing.

After tea, when the peculiar excellence of Betty's coffee and the luxury of Devonshire cream was discussed, Anna proposed that Janet should fetch the beautiful veil which Mrs. Spencer had given, and show it to Mr. Lewis. Janet looked unwilling, and George said it was hardly fair to show it before time ; but Anna's urgency prevailed.

"Now put it on, Janet," Anna said.

"Put a good face on it," whispered Agnes, as she helped to arrange it.

"She is hardly tall enough," said Eleanor, who had never particularly fancied Janet.

"How far prettier and more graceful than a bonnet!" remarked Jacob.

"Yes," said Anna, "much prettier."

"Why don't ladies wear them as in Spain? Only it should be—so," Jacob added, altering the disposition slightly; "and one misses the comb. Janet, a comb would suit you." Then observing her burning blush he pressed her hand encouragingly. But she was ill at ease and bit her lips, while every one was more or less struck with the pretty effect of the soft drapery.

"If women would but adopt the fashion," again remarked Jacob.

"Good gracious, what bold, brazen trollops we should all look, Jacob!" said Miss Russell. "I can't admire it, though it was very kind of you," turning to Mrs. Spencer, "to give so costly a thing, since your son likes it. I own I dislike it, it is like a theatre costume."

"Oh, sister!" exclaimed Anna. "If only one or two ladies would agree to support each other, we might set the fashion."

"So very worldly looking!" observed Eleanor.

"No, Eleanor, remember the nuns' veils," said Agnes.

"One reason more against it! I hate every thing popish," returned Eleanor.

"Was Rebekah papistical?" asked Jacob. "But I fear our climate is against us. It needs a sun like that of Spain to appreciate the grace and modesty of its appearance. It is far more a covering than any bonnet worn by an English lady."

"Stay, Janet! before you take it off you must show how my wreath looks," said Anna, unlocking the box and producing the rice-paper roses.

George shrugged his shoulders, and Agnes came to the rescue.

"Remember, I am to have one! Pink would look well and suit my curls. But you see this is too much of an affair for Janet's wig. It must be a smaller thing."

"Yes! how unfortunately thick her hair is," said Anna. "It is a pity it does not curl either. Ringlets would look so much better for a bride!"

"You and I despise straight hair, don't we, Miss Anna?" said Agnes, shaking her long golden curls as if in mockery, and Anna touched her own wiry corkscrews with complacency, and owned she liked curls.

"In fact," she added, "I have my own opinions about dress, and for years I have made notes on the subject. Sister thinks it is folly, but I do not. I think we should make ourselves pleasing and cultivate taste in everything. Some day I'll show you my sketch—a sort of skeleton essay it is, in which I have sought to point out what is true taste, and how far fashion is from consulting it."

"Are we to have no music?" inquired Jacob, with a sigh of impatience. "Janet, can you play? or would you rather not? We may not play often together again."

She said nothing, but went to the piano-forte and placed on it a favourite piece of Mozart, while he opened his case, and then ascertaining the tone of his instrument he began. Before it was ended Janet's colour had risen and become fixed. She turned from him as he thanked her.

"How well the violin tells in that bit," remarked Agnes. "But what makes your hands so burning?" she added, looking at Janet. "We are going to sing now; I can accompany them; go you and sit in the window like a good child."

They sang several things ; amongst others, by Mrs. Spencer's request, " When shall we three meet again ?"

Janet's head was pressed against the cold panes of glass. She tried hard to compose and restrain herself, but every pulse beat and the room seemed to swim round. She longed to be alone, and at last, catching hold of Agnes, whispered a request for her to cover her retreat, saying she was ill.

Agnes bade her go and she would " manage it," and when George came up with a request for Janet to play an air, she said, " Let her alone, George ! she has a horrid headache. Let her go to bed."

He looked sorry and said, as she cheated him of this evening he should come very early to take her for a walk the next day. Pressing her hand gently he opened the door for her.

They had begun a song before she reached her room. She locked her door, and then stood for a moment like one in a dream. Then suddenly putting her hand to her head, as if in pain, with a wild, terrified countenance, she sank on the nearest seat. " What will become of me ? I marry him ! I can't, I can't ! Is it a demon at my heart that I should feel so about Agnes ?—she who was ever kind to me ! He smiled when she lingered on that high note with her ringing voice. Is it my fault that I have not a voice like hers ? Once—once he used to smile at me when I played anything he liked, but now it is all for her ! She will sing to him when she is his wife ! Shall I see it ? Yes—that is the horror. If we were to part—never, never again to meet—perhaps—then perhaps I might learn to bear it—to forget ! But we shall be constantly meeting as relations—relations ! Yes, he said he was my brother. O, why

should I feel so jealous! Why did this all at once burst on me, turning every thing to poison? How wicked I must be! She was my friend. She is so beautiful—so bright—so gifted. She will cheer him out of sadness—and I know exactly how he will look when he sees her, holding her head aside and looking arch, as he comes in after work. O, I see it all! How his eye changes—not exactly 'brightens,' that isn't the word, but it seems to grow deeper and deeper and you can't get to the bottom, and his brow has that look of peace and strength, unlike any other I ever saw. Oh, my God!—I felt so base, so treacherous, I could not meet her clear blue eye—Oh, I—I——did I *hate* her? Is that the word? God help me in my misery—my sin!"

Her head was bent in bitter anguish as these thoughts surged up—not connected as I have written them, but though sometimes finding vent in a word, mostly uttered in voiceless language.

The storm raged fiercely. Hitherto she had kept it down with a strong hand, shrinking from giving a name to the fire which smouldered in her heart, willing to turn from its threatening voice. But at last it burst forth! It might have been one chance word, one look which was the apparent cause, as it is the last grain which breaks the camel's back, and when once the feeling had asserted its existence and claimed a name, awful was the conflict. She suffered acute bodily pain from the throbbing in her head, but of that she was scarcely conscious. She felt suffocated, and opened her window. But the music, the three blended voices came too plainly through that, as the parlour window was still open to allow the fresh sea breeze to enter. Janet shut hers quickly and paced her room to and fro, like some wild

animal in its cage, making no noise in her swift tread, but trembling from head to foot with agitation—finding no rest for her wild thoughts, only wringing her hands, and now and then exclaiming, "What shall I do!"

Agnes said the truth when she spoke of Janet's inheriting a passionate, impulsive nature. Her own mother had it; and finding the careless, good-humoured affection of her English husband little suited to the demands she made, after the first flush of admiring love had faded—having lived too long on the excitement of crowded audiences and a train of devoted admirers to make an English wife, this singer left her husband and children. Her career was short, and the injured husband, hearing of her distress, sent his forgiveness and blessing to soothe a wretched death-bed, and turned with a bruised heart to the little likeness of the once beautiful Spaniard. Janet was his darling! His unhappy second marriage only fostered and brought out all the evil points in the child's character, and during her sojourn at Queen's Terrace, the great feature of her character had been ignored. Except during her happy intercourse with Jacob as a pupil, she had led a reserved, silent life. Her yearnings for something more than she found in the monotonous routine of her present life never found expression, and would have been misunderstood and entirely condemned if they had.

Silently but surely a strong attachment had grown up in her heart. Unconscious of even its depth, and utterly unaware of its being more than was natural from one kindly treated as she had been in the character of pupil and teacher, her first perception of its strength was when death threatened to remove him for ever. She knew then that she loved him more than any one in the world, that she had pined and

longed for his return, but only as her friend and protector.

Her first introduction to society—her first taste of the draught of life—was intoxicating. She was pleased and touched by George's evident admiration. She felt drawn to him from his having saved Jacob's life. She liked him. It was all new, all delightful! Without experience to compare one thing with another, she gave up to her impulsive temper, wholly ignorant where the path she was treading might lead. When first marriage was placed before her she started back. The way the Miss Russells put it to her was irritating beyond measure; and when urged in another manner by George himself, she instinctively hesitated, and felt that though her greatest pleasures had been derived from him and his family, her liking for him was not what it should be—not at all answering to what he professed for her.

Again, she turned to her best friend, comparing the two, with no advantage to George—only unconsciously relying on opposition from Mr. Russell to any scheme which should take her from them. When she found that he wished it, had set his heart upon it, as his sisters affirmed, there was a feeling of pique. If he did not care about losing her, why should she not go? In a worldly point of view, she knew it was an offer not to be hastily rejected. What were her prospects? The least caprice or displeasure on Miss Russell's part would send her off to be a governess.

She liked George, and was grateful for his preference, and every one assured her that she ought not to make him unhappy by refusing him. She had suffered herself to be led, therefore; but through all that time a low voice had whispered warnings. Something had ever and anon pricked

her heart, a shadow had followed her, and George's voice began to sound less pleasant, his smile often annoyed her, and she felt they were not suited. Her temper became uncertain, no one pleased her; a dark, undefined suspicion lay at her heart. She did not encourage, she resisted it. Now she would drive away thought, avoid solitude, laugh and talk, and assure herself she was happy and should be happy, when it was all over and her lot in life cast. George talked of travels in distant lands, and she returned to her room to dream of them, and smile at this fulfiment of her castles in the air. A bright prospect lay before her.

Every one said she was fortunate, and her own heart re-echoed the cry; but even then, a low distant rumble made itself heard—a portent of something coming—a something she could not see, could not grasp; and so it went on. Trembling on the brink of an abyss she was in some sense conscious of, yet turned her head from: but at last there came a moment when the distant rumbling burst in thunder-claps over her head. Frightful was the disclosure to herself. How avoid it? which way could she turn?

There was another's happiness bound up in hers now, a joyous, honest heart to be bruised or broken. But even were she to sacrifice herself, her truth—woman's dearest privilege—for him, would there not come a day of reckoning, a day of revelation to him? And then what would he say?

She had no hope, none. Her hope was set for ever in this world. But it remained to her to be true to herself—not to betray her own heart, not to stoop to grasp the lesser because she could not reach the higher.

She was frightened at the discovery of her intense jealousy;

she blamed, she hated herself. And she felt that she had no right to trust to her own power of suppressing or hiding this feeling, so much as they should come in contact. Janet had not been taught the right and only way of meeting such an awful ordeal, yet out of the depths of her misery she called on God for help, and at that moment flashed fully before her, man's utter weakness in the presence of mighty passions.

As these last thoughts arose she grew calmer. A feeling that the God who made her would not desert her now in her utmost need if she followed His teaching, and gave herself up to Him, stilled the tempest of her soul. Kneeling down, she prayed with all her strength for a right judgment. She had no earthly friend to counsel her. O, she would lay down all her hopes—give them all up for the assurance of being right;—if God would enable her to strangle the snake in her heart, which led her to be faithless to her friend—— She begged God to bless her—Agnes, and make her happy. Many times she repeated this. It was balm to her sore heart. Then she rose, bathed her forehead and face, and tried to think calmly, to judge what was right to do. She had given her happiness up. She hoped she had—but what further was to be done? Should she go on, and marry George Spencer, and trust to God's help to enable her to be a good wife—or should she break it off?

No wonder the young girl shrank from this latter way. The reproaches, the anger, George's true sorrow, Agnes's misery, *his* wonder and quiet blame;—Oh, no! she couldn't stand it. What then?

Backwards and forwards her mind wandered, wearily, hopelessly. She felt as if she was losing her senses. Oh,

that she could fly away and be at rest! But where—how?

Janet had reached this point, when voices were heard in the passage; presently came a knock at the door.

"Janet, dear, your veil!" It was Agnes.

Janet opened the door, and her friend threw her arms round her, scolding her for being still up, and asking how she felt now.

How Janet despised herself for shuddering at that kind touch! But she answered in so low and hollow a voice that Agnes deemed it unwise to keep her there. She kissed her tenderly again and again, hoped she would be better to-morrow; it pained them all to see her low or ill.

Oh, that morrow!—They said good-night, and parted.

The sound of Janet's voice and the burning feel of her face and hands Agnes often thought of afterwards.

Janet was left undisturbed by Agnes's earnest request. But having no light she went softly to the kitchen to get one.

Betty afterwards affirmed that she thought it was "just a ghost, so soft like she glided in, and so hollow and wan was her face. And her hands was all of a tremble like, I thought sure she'd blink out the light. I knew she was ill, well enough, but her never liked being bothered with questions, so I said naught, but Martha and I telled on't to ourselves—so we did!"

CHAPTER IX.

LOST, STOLEN, OR STRAYED.

"WHERE'S Jane?" asked Miss Russell the next morning, when they were assembled for prayer. Betty went to call her, but returned with rather a blank face to say she was not in her room.

"Well, upon my word," began Miss Russell; but Jacob said quietly, "We will not wait, sister," and opened the book.

At breakfast Miss Russell said, "Well, where is she? just like her, full of vagaries."

"I am sure I hope she will be more punctual and regular when she is married," remarked Anna.

Jacob said that this was the first time he remembered her being absent from prayers, except when she was ill; very likely she might be gone to the Spencers'.

"You always excuse her, Jacob; you will ruin that girl. It is very lucky she is going away, I am sure."

Jacob sighed, and presently asked if anything further had been settled about it.

"Oh," said Anna, "it is settled for Thursday week, and Mr. Spencer alluded to it to Janet, and she said nothing

against it. I believe it was yesterday or the day before; and really, Jacob, if you have any influence with her, I would advise you to use it, and tell her to be more gracious and cheerful. I am obliged to say all sorts of things for her to Mr. Spencer. I am quite an interpreter between them. Perhaps she fancies it is pretty to sit one day like a marble statue, and then to be half wild with excitement."

"She is naturally impulsive and sensitive," said Jacob.

"Yes; and she ought to begin to mend her faults. I quite begin to despair about her," said Anna.

"She is very young yet," remarked Jacob.

"Indeed she is," said Miss Russell. "Far too young to be married, I think!"

"Oh, no!" said Anna, "the younger the better. And, sister, I thought you approved, and you said she was a different person after knowing them."

"It is a fine thing for her, no doubt," said Miss Russell. "But I confess I think she is too young."

Jacob said nothing more, but before the breakfast was over Mr. Spencer came to inquire how Janet was.

"We thought she was with you," said Jacob, putting down the newspaper.

"What, isn't she at Mrs. Spencer's?" asked Anna.

"No; but very possibly she may be on the beach, it is such a lovely morning; and there was some talk between her and Aggy about going out before breakfast. Agnes's account last night made me uneasy. I'll go and find her," said he, smiling.

"Well, lovers are easily pleased, at any rate!" remarked Miss Russell, with something that was intended for a smile. "He won't like it by-and-by, though! Miss Jane will

have to come down from her romancing, or I would not give much for her household management."

Jacob went to the Quay, and the breakfast things were removed. Betty kept the tea hot for Janet. Twelve o'clock struck—Mr. Spencer returned, tired and heated. He said he had been on the beach, on the terrace, on the cliff-path, and home by the lane, and could see nothing of her.

Betty looked anxious, but Mr. Lewis happened to call on business, and when he heard of it he smiled, and said, "I have no doubt Miss Nairn is on some solitary rock, forgetful of time, of everything! What? cannot you find her, Mr. Spencer? Very odd; why, if I was a young man in your situation I think I should have no difficulty. Ladies—young ladies—who have—hem—certain pleasant thoughts, are always inclined to be sentimental!"

Mr. Lewis smiled, and looked round the room, pulling up his cravat.

Mr. Spencer looked impatient, and said he wished Mr. Lewis would be so kind as to say what rock he meant. "Very sentimental, indeed, to stay till noon without breakfast."

Miss Russell suggested it as possible that she might have gone to Mrs. Spencer's after her walk one way, while Mr. Spencer went the other, and so they had missed.

"Well, I'll go once more and see; perhaps Agnes may know, I didn't see her just now," and he was off. But very soon he returned, looking frightened. "No one at home knows anything about her!" He threw himself on a chair —then presently started up: "The Corner! the tide! the Point!" exclaimed he, with his face as pale as ashes, for he remembered her telling Agnes, in one of her wild fits, she

should certainly try to go round some day, and it was known to be a dangerous place.

Mr. Lewis looked alarmed, and they left the house hastily together. Miss Russell, too, looked grave and anxious, though she said she didn't believe it; they would find it was all some piece of nonsense.

Jacob came home: he had apparently forgotten Janet's absence at breakfast, and concluded she was at home again. He walked up to the rose, and touched it in a dreamy way.

"Janet cannot be found!" said Anne. "Mr. Spencer has searched everywhere, and he and Mr. Lewis are gone to the Point now. But surely she would not be so foolish, knowing so well——"

Jacob's face, and an uplifting of the hands, expressed more than a hundred exclamations. Mr. Spencer's face had not been whiter than his was now.

At this moment Betty rushed into the room. "Master!—the Quay!—the ships!—remember!"

"God forbid!" groaned Jacob; and, taking his hat, he went to the Quay with hasty strides, and, sending his clerk to inquire of all the boatmen, and on board the vessels, he walked up and down the pier with so agitated a face, that the little boys who were fishing by the steps stopped to stare at him.

The clerk returned in an hour's time. No one had seen or heard anything of her.

A brig was going to sail, and the master was waiting for final orders. Jacob was obliged to go to the counting-house, and, with trembling hands, signed papers, and gave directions in a forced, husky voice. While he was thus occupied, Betty came. She sat down till the captain was gone, and then,

sobbing as if her heart would break, she took a parcel from under her shawl, and placed it before Jacob.

"The gentlemen have come back, and can't get no word, and the tide is quite up, sir; and they think she's drowned! No, sir!—don't hurry yourself, sir!" said Betty, laying her hand on him as he was about to rise. "I don't fancy 'tis so, and I looked carefully all round her room, and at last I come upon this, sir; and I thought maybe the poor soul wished you to see it to yourself, sir."

"What is it?"

"I found it on her mantelpiece, covered over with a book, sir."

Betty retired a step or two behind him as he tore open the parcel. A note lay inside, but Jacob was obliged to wipe his eyes before he could make it out. It contained the diamond and the turquoise rings, and the watch. These words were hastily written, not without blots:—

"Some day Mr. Spencer will learn to be glad that I have at last found the courage I ought to have had long before. I am not ungrateful to him, or to any one, though it may seem so. I am old enough to be no longer a burthen. I can, and will, maintain myself." A few words were scratched out, and "Janet" added.

* * * * * *

Betty had never seen him shed a tear before, and, for fear of intrusion, she barred the door, and walked up and down noiselessly, unwilling for him to remember he had a witness, and knowing, if she sat still, her sobs would betray her.

Long and violent was the struggle. At length it ceased, that frightful outpouring of a strong and reserved man's grief; but he sat so still, that Betty was alarmed. She

touched his shoulder: "Master!—Mr. Jacob! Take heart, sir! The Lord is over all!"

He held out the note. "Read it; you were her best friend." Then he rose, swallowed a glass of water which stood on the table, and told Betty to take the note to the ladies, and say he should not be home till evening.

Betty watched him as he passed the window, and, shaking her head, murmured a prayer, "that the strong man and the weak child might be upheld by the same Hand, and that hereafter, if not now, they might both be happy in His presence."

Mr. Spencer was standing by the window when Betty brought the letter to her mistress. Mrs. Spencer and Agnes were there, too. Anna began to read it aloud; but Mr. Spencer begged he might look at it first. She did not refuse, and he turned to the window, and opened it. In a few moments he threw it on the table, and left the house, without making any remark.

Poor Mrs. Spencer would have followed him, had not her daughter prevented her. Nothing could exceed her sorrow for "the poor young creature;" but for her dear son she was alarmed. She had never seen him sorrow in that way or look so before. When she heard the letter, she only exclaimed: "Poor soul! she could not help it, you know; she could not have loved him. George will see she could not. Poor George!"

The Miss Russells—even Anna—were too indignant for talking; they were dreadfully mortified and vexed. Mrs. Spencer and Agnes soon left, Agnes without the shadow of a smile, her mother leaning on her arm.

The Spencers spent the evening in sorrow; but there was

no anger. George was deeply grieved—it was his first great trial; but he had good comforters in his mother and sister. He was troubled and anxious as to what had become of Janet. It was some relief to find she was alive, and not drowned, as he had at one moment imagined possible. He wrote two or three letters to her, imploring her to think better of it, or to return home, even if she would not marry him; then tore them up, not knowing where to direct. The sentence about maintaining herself relieved them from a dreadful fear.

At Queen's Terrace there was anger, and no pity. Miss Russell repeated over and over again that it served them all right "for taking in beggars, and making fine ladies of them."

Anna shed tears, and said that Janet seemed born to thwart her in every way. What a disgrace it was—what would be said?

In the course of the evening, Mr. Lewis came to "offer consolation," as he told Betty. The letter was shown him, and he, weighing each word, pronounced it a most mysterious, unaccountable affair. No reason given—not even mentioning where she was gone. "It was quite unjustifiable to harrow people's feelings so! Really, to make such a fuss! It was a scene got up for effect," he was afraid; "for, after all, she was evidently alive."

"And to go off in such a scandalous manner!" added Miss Russell.

"And not to mention our names, even!" exclaimed Anna, indignantly. "Not a word expressive of gratitude for all we have done for her!"

"I wonder where she is," remarked Mr. Lewis.

"Oh, gone to her precious mother, depend on it! It is a

plot—a plot from beginning to end. You know, Anna, I told you I suspected she was corresponding with her mother; for I found a torn letter in her room, and she would not tell me what it was about. Depend upon it, it is a plot," repeated Miss Russell.

"How shocking!" said Anna, softly.

"Have you any idea," observed Mr. Lewis, speaking low, and looking mysterious; "have you any idea if there is anything in the family—any—" and he touched his head and frowned as he spoke.

"We know nothing of the family beyond what you yourself know, sir," said Miss Russell.

"Ah, true! But, now I think of it, doesn't it strike you there was a wildness about her eye?"

"Nothing but temper and pride," said Miss Russell.

"I think there was something odd," continued Mr. Lewis. "Besides, how can we otherwise account for this proceeding? To leave so capital a match! What objection could she possibly have?"

"Oh, don't talk of it!" exclaimed Anna. "How I have set my heart on it! It is very well for cold, prudent, calculating people, like Jacob, to take it so quietly; but, really, for persons of any feeling—oh, dear!—it is dreadful!—dreadful!"

When tea was brought in, Mr. Lewis asked for Jacob, and was told he had not returned.

Mr. Russell did not return till quite late, and then, hearing from Betty that Mr. Lewis was in the parlour, he went up into his own room, and said he was very tired, and must go to bed.

The next morning, Jacob began to ask his sisters what

they had better do—whether he should go to Exeter, or write——

But he was interrupted by his sister's almost gasping from suppressed agitation, and, when she could speak, forbidding him, or any one, ever to mention that name in her presence. It was a disgrace to them which could never be wiped out. She had, for once in her life, acted hastily in consenting to take her, all owing to Mr. Grant's and Jacob's romancing. Never again would she have the subject mentioned. It was lucky no more mischief was done!

And no more was said. But Betty mourned over her master's altered appearance; and for weeks he was seriously ill, and did not leave his room.

In a few days after the occurrence, George and his sister Agnes left Wareham, to pay a visit to friends in Ireland, it was said, but really to escape from gossip and scrutiny, and to leave a place which was now only painful. Mrs. Spencer and her eldest daughter remained.

"It was just like a dream," as Betty remarked to her master, when, with tiptoe steps, she moved about his sick room.

CHAPTER X.

CUTTING THE GORDIAN KNOT.

And what had become of Janet?

After fetching the light from the kitchen, she sat down to try and quietly consider what step she should take first. One idea only possessed her. She must escape,—get away quietly and without fuss.

But where should she go?

The thought of her father now brought some tears, soon checked, however. If he lived, she would go to him. Of late she had heard and read of that country, and knew it was a possible thing to go, though not at present. She must work first and get money. Her stepmother was living at Exeter, and perhaps she might find employment as a daily governess, living with her stepmother.

True, Mrs. Nairn had never liked her, and would probably be angry now to see her again; but after all she was her father's wife, and Janet was older and rather wiser, and would try hard not to annoy her. At all events she must try, and surely she had a little claim on her for protection and shelter!

Janet was at an age when past difficulties and troubles are easily laid aside and forgotten. She was sanguine and eager to begin a new life and feel independent.

To stay on at Queen's Terrace, even should George Spencer no longer trouble her, would be gall and misery to her for the future. Anything was better than that.

Her feelings were not very clear, but she was resolved to go, and for the moment all other considerations must be put away.

While Mr. Lewis and George Spencer were searching for her, and Mr. Russell was reviewing her life with them in sorrowful self-reproach and perplexity, sitting in his dismal counting-house, Janet was fast approaching a new phase in her life.

At the close of a long, weary day, she left the rough kindness of the driver of the carrier's cart, which plied between Wareham and Exeter, and in which she had found a seat. After inquiring at one or two small shops, she rapped at the black knocker of a small house, the aspect of which was not very reassuring.

A well-remembered shrill voice was heard within, calling, "Ellen, Ellen, why don't you open the door?"

There was no turning back now, however much her courage sank, and in another moment the door was roughly thrown open, and Janet stood face to face with one she knew to be her stepsister Ellen, although she did not recognise her the least.

To her stare of inquiry Janet meekly said, "Ellen! don't you know me? I am Janet."

"Mamma!" screamed the girl. "Why, here's Janet," and then rushing back into the room, in a loud whisper

added, "She's looking so ill and dowdy. Some row is up, I am sure!"

Sick and faint, Janet stood for an instant, half wishing to turn away again, but Ellen put her head out of the door and said,

"Why don't you come in?"

So she did go in, and found herself once again in presence of her stepmother—not much altered. Ellen was grown a tall, stout girl, much taller and bigger than herself: she was like her mother, a handsome but hard face, with a bright colour, and dressed with evident attempt to be smart and fashionable—a style very unpleasing to Janet's fastidious taste.

Mrs. Nairn gave her a warm embrace, and asked eagerly after her friends at first, but then she was struck with Janet's weary look, and said, "What brings you here? Are you come for shopping, or out of affection for me, I wonder?"

Then when she learnt that Janet had left the Russells, she took another tone, and asked her if she thought she could afford to maintain her?

"No," and Janet explained eagerly that she meant to work for herself, at which Mrs. Nairn laughed, and said she would soon tell another story. She knew how it was! Temper was never really conquered, it would always come out, and of course she knew that sooner or later Janet's temper would blaze out and cause a battle-royal with that old starched lady.

Very low fell Janet's hopes as Mrs. Nairn talked on, half angrily and half scornfully, setting down all her assurances that she meant to work as so much nonsense.

"Who would work that could in any way avoid it? Better

eat humble pie and pocket her pride, and go back, where at least there was money, and if she played her cards well it was certain she would be provided for by-and-by. Bless me, girl, I expected you would make a good match. You ought, with your face! I even thought you and the bachelor brother would hit it off, and if all I hear is true of his savings you might do worse."

Then she advised Janet to write and beg pardon and beg to be received again, and when all her persuasions were useless, she said in a vexed way, "Why hadn't Ellen got such a chance? But you always were half a fool, like your father. And now you are here you must stay, I suppose. You'll have to share Ellen's bed, and take what you can get, for I am poor as possible and live very hardly. I, who have always been used to better things, I can only keep one maid of all work. Ellen goes to school, and that's all my uncle will do for me now!"

As she talked on, growing calmer as she proceeded, Janet took a quiet survey of the room. It was small, and had an air of general discomfort and neglect. On the soiled chintz sofa-cover was scattered some linen, which had been left for mending, and with it a greasy dog-eared book. The side-board was undusted and unpolished, and dirty glasses, a cup and plate, and an open workbox lay in confusion side by side with a bonnet and shawl. The cover of Mrs. Nairn's easy chair was torn, and the window blind thick with dust and yellow from smoke.

In a short time Ellen called to the girl to bring the tea, and then it was discovered there was no butter; so Ellen tied on her bonnet and went herself to buy some. Every-thing was a complete contrast to the precise nicety and order

kept by Miss Russell; but after feeling a little refreshed with her tea, Janet thought she could do something towards putting things into more comfortable order, and she said so to Mrs. Nairn cheerfully, adding that she had been taught to be useful, and till she heard of employment she would try and help her stepmother.

But her proposal met with no gracious reception. Mrs. Nairn returned again and again to the folly of quarrelling with her friends, and reproached her with injuring Ellen and herself as well; "for," she said, "depend upon it they will not forgive this step of yours. You actually left without telling them?—and what could be your motive, I should like to know?"

The constant reiteration of this, together with the high-pitched voice of both Mrs. Nairn and Ellen, made Janet's head ache. She was glad when they proposed that she should go to bed; and then, on this first night of her long desired liberty, she sobbed herself to sleep, thinking of George Spencer and Agnes: wondering what they thought of her now; and Mr. Russell, so long her friend, what could he suppose,—that she should run away and cause so much trouble. "He must indeed wish he had never seen me—that miserable time. And how kind he was! I can hear his voice now, the first time he came into that lodging where poor Tom lay dying."

But this last remembrance was too painful, it broke down the last faint attempt at self-control. All her fine feelings of "honest pride and self-respecting independence" with which she had buoyed herself up, were now crushed, and she felt very humble and very naughty, as well as very hopeless about the future. Had any one been there to seize

the opportunity everything might have been changed. But there was no one, and when she awoke the next morning, after several hours of sound sleep, she felt very differently, and able to laugh at her own folly and want of courage.

She could once more look on the step as at least justifiable, in saving her from making false vows. There was but this way, for no one would listen to her or believe her. They had driven her to it.

Very proud was Janet that morning to make good her promise, and to bring the house into a little more order. She borrowed an apron and tucked up her sleeves, working with her own hands at the regular cleaning and putting to rights she insisted on having. Once she smiled to herself, recollecting a day long ago, when Miss Russell had told her to sweep the floor. She could afford to be thankful now for that lady's lessons, though she was very glad there was no possibility of her seeing her so employed, or of hearing, "Ah, Jane! so your pride is come down at last! Didn't I tell you so?" and so on.

And as she grew to see the defects in Ellen, and shrank from her rough, vulgar, self-willed ways, Janet confessed that she ought to be very grateful in that she was better taught, and however hard had been her life in the past years, what would it have been had Mr. Russell never visited them then, and been moved to save the forlorn little girl from a fate he too well foresaw? These thoughts made Janet more forbearing and patient now, and helped her to check a sharp and angry answer to her stepmother's irritating remarks.

For the first two or three days Janet began to hope she should manage to live in peace if not in much comfort, different as was the style from that she had been accustomed

to. But then came a change, which at first shattered her hopes woefully, and brought back old feelings of disgust and horror which she had hoped were buried for ever.

Mrs. Nairn signified her intention of going to a few shops one afternoon, and Ellen before setting off for school had spoken pertly, and said her mother had better stay at home. An argument arose, which horrified Janet from its rudeness and utter want of temper.

She tried to silence Ellen, who retorted that she was a goose, and far too fine a lady to be here. But she'd soon open her eyes a little wider, and own that Ellen was right in saying their mother oughtn't to go out shopping. And Ellen walked off to school in dudgeon.

Mrs. Nairn remained to re-adjust her dress, which distressed Janet from its smartness, and after venturing a few unintelligible angry words on Ellen, she also went away, leaving Janet alone. She occupied herself with sewing till a visitor was announced, an acquaintance of Mrs. Nairn's Janet had already seen.

This Mrs. French lived in a very moderate way by herself in furnished lodgings, over the stationer's shop not far off. She seemed to have no relations, but a very wide acquaintance, and was not particular who she visited. She said she liked to make herself useful, and certainly she contrived to know what every one needed.

She had a good-natured, simple manner, which drew people on to confide in her at once. Nor did she betray this confidence to their injury. She was extremely inquisitive, and Janet thought it was her sole employment to find out everything about everybody. Janet's presence in Mrs. Nairn's house puzzled her.

Mrs. Nairn had been wont to boast of a daughter who was brought up by "very wealthy friends," and Mrs. French could not at all understand why she remained here, and still less, when Janet asked her if she could help her to find employment as a daily governess.

Question after question she put to find out Janet's history, and at last she wound up with, "Well, I often do hear of such things—indeed at this moment I know a lady in search of a temporary governess; but she is very particular as to who she has, as to references and so on—and you see, what can I tell her?"

"Simply that I am living here for the present, and wish to find employment. I have no references to give, for I have never taught before."

"And this lady requires a first-rate piano-forte teacher; in fact her children are to learn everything. They are rich; between ourselves, he is the great linen-draper here, but lives quite in style in their villa half a mile on the T—— road. They are very anxious to give good manners to their children, so I really think you would suit. You'll have to dress a little better, pardon me! You have been at school, I suppose?"

"No," Janet said.

"Indeed! But you undertake all the accomplishments, I suppose?"

"I can teach music and a little French."

It ended in Mrs. French promising to speak to her friends about Janet, and then finding she could not get at Janet's history, she took leave.

That night and all the next day Janet began to despair of any one's taking her as a teacher. Such miserable disgrace

was on them, for Mrs. Nairn had returned in the same state she so often used to be in the old days. Janet had to help her to bed, and there she was all the next day!

Ellen laughed, and said, "Oh, yes, that was a matter of course, as long as the money lasted; but old uncle Cross-bones, alias Green, said she was killing herself fast, and he had refused to give her another penny. Only for your kind friend Mr. Russell, Janet, I think we should have starved, and as it is I can tell you there's a frightful lot of bills to pay, and she will keep the money and scarcely gives me enough clothes, only that I will have it! And you will have to stick up for your rights, I can tell you—and I warn you, if you ever do get any money, just keep it safe out of her sight. The quarter's pay came into the bank yesterday, I know, and that's why she went shopping. She is ill always for two or three days, and then up she is again and out! and so it is—till all is gone or lost, for she gets robbed often. I have sometimes thought I would give old Russell a hint not to give it all to her. Bless you, he can't form an idea of how she spends it!"

"Do you mean that he—that Mr. Russell gives her money now?" Janet said, in a way which made her sister laugh heartily.

"How tragic we are! Well, yes he does, and has done so for a long time. And why not? He's rolling in riches, they say, and why should you wish to keep it all for yourself?"

Janet sighed, and leaned her head on her hand. "Just to think of it!—to think that after all we are having his money."

"Bless me, Janet!" exclaimed Ellen, really puzzled at her sister's sad look. "What's the harm? Didn't you know mamma was poor as a church mouse? Our fine papa ruined

us all. Beggars can't ride on horseback. You wouldn't wish to see mamma working, I suppose? Didn't those Russells come out of the way to find us out? Why, those people—all that sort—live upon it, 'tis their meat and drink, and their pleasure, to patronise and 'do good.' Let them, say I. And didn't they get you in that way? I've heard mamma say many a time that she as good as sold you to——"

"Sold!—Sold *me!*"

"Yes, sold you—not to be a slave exactly, but to be the darling pet and protegée of those women. Mamma can mimic the way they said it! La, they wanted you to pet or to bully. Old maids always want some live thing—children, or cats, or birds. They had their pleasure out of you, and mamma never interfered. Why, you are such a goose and such a simpleton! but you see I know a thing or two, and I know you are pretty and have got good eyes, and mamma might have married you well here, but she gave up the chance, and for that she gets her money. I'll tell you a secret;—she believed you and Mr. Russell would be falling in love, and she says you are an idiot not to have caught him. But I think you are right, for he is too old."

"He is not old, Ellen."

"Well, he looks so, and that's all the same; or he is so grave, and that's the same. Not but what I like him well enough—only he hasn't any spirit; I suppose he is a Quaker or a Baptist, or something extra strict?"

"He is something you don't understand, that's very clear; and now, once for all, let me tell you that I never was sold—and that if—if your mother thought she had made a bargain of me, she's mistaken. I am free, and free I mean to be. I am ashamed, vexed to the heart to think we get money from—

why I actually eat bread they pay for, even now—and I never knew or dreamt of it! However, I shall soon get employment, and I can support myself, and soon, perhaps, if you help, we can support *her*, and be independent."

"Thank you! No work for me! I have no pride, thank goodness; I've no objection to accept anything they like to offer—the more the better!"

The dark shadow which fell on their home caused Janet to conquer her first objections to seeking employment as a governess to a "shopkeeper's children," as she said. Any respectable and honest way of earning something was better than living as she did now; and she said so to Mrs. French. So one day a note came from that lady, begging that Miss Nairn would call at Oak Villa and see Mrs. Marsh.

"Goodness me, Janet, how can you go in that shabby coarse straw bonnet?" asked her stepmother.

"I have no other, and it must do," answered Janet, looking very uncomfortable at the idea of her visit altogether.

"I've not half-a-crown to lend you, child, certainly, and I don't think I could get credit at the bonnet shop. Well, well, it puzzles me how you came to leave the Russells. You will live to repent it; for if you had only played your cards well you were sure to come in for a good share of their hoards. Why, they are as rich as can be! I heard so at Wareham, and I've heard so since. Bless me, you had better write and apologise, or let me do it, and perhaps they'll take you back. You little know what you are driving at. Governess forsooth! Slavery! I'll write, and you can write too, and then after a little humble pie—which we must all eat our share of, I can tell you—they'll take you back again."

"Never!" cried Janet. "I never can or will go back.

I mean to work, so don't fear—and don't try to frighten me. I mean to earn money, and save it too," and she carried her head so uprightly and looked so resolved that Mrs. Nairn with a loud sigh gave up any more advice. And Janet set off in the shabby coarse straw bonnet, and with little difficulty found "Oak Villa," a spacious house of some pretension, standing in a tolerably sized garden, out of the town. She was ushered into the dining-room by a stiff and tall footman, who must have had his orders, and who stared at her.

The big shining mahogany table and massive sideboard, with the heavy horse-hair chairs, looked cold and forbidding; and then Janet studied the pictures—full-sized portraits of the master and mistress, she supposed—stiff, hard paintings of common-place looking individuals, in very elaborate dress. She was trying to read the lady's probable character from the picture when the door opened very wide, and in walked Mrs. Marsh herself, who had very large and round black eyes, which were fixed on Janet immediately. Janet curtsied and the lady bowed, and then after a moment's pause she pointed to a chair, taking also one for herself. The silence was awful, Janet thought—with those hard expressionless eyes still on her.

"I was asked to call by Mrs. French, ma'am," she began.

"Certainly.—You are a qualified governess?"

"I have not taught before," quickly answered Janet. "But I believe I can—that is, I can teach young children; I should not like undertaking any but young ones at first."

"No; you are very young yourself. Can you teach the pianoforte, and French? and of course all common things—and I am particular about fancy work, and Mr. Marsh is particular about their writing a good hand. I should like to

see your writing, if you don't mind; and—and—perhaps you will play something"—and Mrs. Marsh pointed to a pianoforte as she spoke, but all the time her eyes never moved from Janet's face.

The colour mounted to her very temples as she rose hastily, and there was an uncomfortable rising in her throat too, but she remembered her stepmother's words and looks, and the necessity for earning something, in time to control herself with an effort.

She played a Scotch air with variations, which she fancied would be likely to please Mrs. Marsh. When it was finished she got up, and standing by the table she said—"Now, shall I write, ma'am?"

Then Mrs. Marsh arose slowly and took a writing case from a side table, which she placed before Janet, and stood watching her rapid fingers.

"Dear me, you are very quick! But it is not exactly a bad hand. Thank you, I will show this to Mr. Marsh, and will let you know soon. As to terms—I gave my last governess 15*l.* a year; she came at ten and remained till five, walking out with my children, and attending to their early dinner in the school-room. As you are young and inexperienced this is more than you ought to claim. I know a governess to a friend's children, who only receives 12*l.* but if you can help them to prepare for the dancing master, and just let them practise their steps with you, I won't mind giving 15*l.* paid quarterly."

There was no need, Janet thought, to say anything more. She bowed, and the lady bowed and rang the bell, and then the tall footman opened the front door for her. The air was grateful to her flushed cheeks.

Perhaps her stepmother was right, and she had been guilty of great folly in leaving Wareham. What a life lay before her! Mrs. Marsh evidently looked on her as something quite beneath herself. And to have those hard eyes always looking at her and judging her! But after all the children might prove better, and her duty would be in the schoolroom with them; and after five she should have the evening to herself—at least not quite to herself, for then there would be the stepmother and Ellen. But courage! it would not do to give it up directly. It was a beginning. She would be earning something, and this would lead to something better, and she would be so prudent and saving, so as to put by money, and then by-and-by she should go to Australia, and be happy.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

The next few days were trying for Janet, who was eager to be at work at once, and fretted at the suspense. Mrs. Nairn grew more and more low spirited and uncertain in temper, and treated her stepdaughter with bitter complaints against her uncle, Mr. Green, who lived in the city, and was, as she said, "an old widower rolling in wealth, but terribly cross and stingy."

To be near him had been her motive for coming to the place. She was his only relation, and yet he left her to starve; and the last time he was in the house he had stormed and scolded so that it made her very ill, and then banging the door he had declared he would never set foot in the place again, "using quite shocking words, Janet, I assure you; dreadful, wicked words."

At this Ellen laughed rudely, which made her mother angry and call her "disrespectful," and led to a long history of Ellen's misconduct, and all the anxiety and trouble she caused her mother. Janet knew not how to answer her, it was all so painful.

Whenever Mrs. Nairn went out "for a little stroll," she returned in a state which brought back all the old misery and shame.

"Bless you!" exclaimed Ellen once, seeing Janet's grave face of distress, "if you live here you will have to get used to this, and more than this, I can tell you! Why, sometimes she's shut in her room for weeks, and that's my holiday, and I do as I like. But when she is noisy and scolding it is dreadful, and 'tis no great wonder old Drybones was disgusted, though he need not punish me for that."

"Drybones?" repeated Janet.

"Well, Drybones, or Crossbones—all the same. Won't you laugh when you see the old man—that is, if you are not frightened at him! And now, sister Janet, I was told to ask you to come with me, to spend the evening and have tea with my friends. They're very particularly desirous of knowing you. Will you come?"

"Where is it you are going?"

"Well, you needn't turn up your nose at them, though they are in trade! They've plenty of money, and Emma is at school with me, and we are great friends. Mr. Grove keeps a large tea-shop in the next street: and they've such a nice drawing-room! and Mrs. Grove gives no end of a good tea, I can tell you."

There was a little silent struggle in Janet's mind. She hardly liked mixing herself up with Ellen's friends, and yet she was but young, and it was very dull here. It might make the time seem shorter, and keep off her thoughts for a time from Mrs. Marsh's answer. "Yes, she would come."

But Janet regretted she had consented afterwards; for although Mrs. Grove was a kind, motherly woman, who thought Janet looked pale and careworn, and that the best cure for her was to eat heartily of her buttered Sally Lunns

and apricot-jam;—and although Mr. Grove was inoffensive, and only spoke to press her to eat more; yet the younger members of the family annoyed her. Emma was affected, and full of desire to be genteel and fashionable; while the brother, Edward, with intense self-approval and confidence, paid Janet the most marked attention. There was a good deal of managing and whispering about their places at the tea-table; and when, at last, Janet found herself next to Edward, Ellen and her friend giggled audibly; and then Janet's too ready blushes made Mrs. Grove say: "Don't mind, my dear Miss Nairn! 'Tis Ted's way—he do admire beauty so much; and I assure you he's been worrying these many days to get a sight of you—ever since our shop-boy saw you pass along with your sister. But Ted means no harm at all."

"Harm!" echoed Ted. "It is me who gets the harm! Bright eyes shouldn't be scornful, and pretty lips ain't made to be kept glued together." Then lowering his voice to a whisper: "'Twas no wonder your stepmamma boasted of the absent daughter. The wonder is she could ever consent to be so long without her."

No cold speech or angry looks seemed to touch him; he persisted in laying himself out for her amusement, and showing his admiration. Edward Mitchell had been nothing to this man, she thought! From his carefully-adjusted and well-oiled curls, to his big ring, Janet entirely disliked him. His voice—one of that kind without any tone—added to a strong dash of Devonshire dialect, irritated her till she felt fidgety and restless. At last it struck the proud mother (who fancied that Edward Grove was the most fascinating, killing young man in all Exeter) that Janet had the strangely bad taste not to approve of her son's manner.

"Perhaps the young lady would like looking over some pictures, Ted," she suggested; and then, drawing him aside, she whispered, "Let her be a little, poor thing; she's shy and out of health."

Which speech, however, only urged him on; for it piqued him that this little, plainly-dressed girl, who wanted to be a teacher, should not be sensible to his attractions. He confided to his sister and to Ellen, that he admired Janet extremely. "It was a very pecooliar style, no doubt, and reminded him of a pretty girl he had seen at a circus, in some character. Everybody would not approve of her; but he liked her eyes, and her hair was very good, and dressed very knowingly, too." In fact, Mr. Edward Grove, junior, happened just then to be rather dull; his last "young lady," as his sister said, having jilted him; and Janet came just in time to fill up the gap. He was so fond of the ladies, he must always be falling in love. He counted the hearts he had broken, as an Indian his scalps, and Emma, as sisters occasionally do, flattered him, and assured him that every girl was taken with him.

It was somewhat a relief when a round-game was proposed; but as it was the Grove custom to go into partnership, and other guests dropped in, they paired off, leaving Janet again to Edward Grove. It is impossible to repeat all the compliments he paid, or all the admiration he insinuated, over the counters. Janet was resolving to give one terribly-cutting answer, to put an end to her misery; but she perceived that very much the same kind of thing was going on with all the others. It was evidently the approved manner, and no ways remarkable; so she struggled for patience, that she might not break out and make a disturbance. Could her Wareham friends have seen her through a magic glass, they

might have wondered what she had gained by leaving them! At last it was over; and her tormentor, having gallantly escorted herself and Ellen to their door, had presumed to squeeze her hand tenderly, and hoped to be so fortunate as to meet her in her walk on the morrow.

Janet rushed through the narrow passage, straight up into the small attic she shared with Ellen, and, throwing herself on her knees by the bed, she actually sobbed.

On Ellen's inquiring if she was ill, she exclaimed: "Yes, ill and sick—sick at heart, at being brought so low. I am punished now, at any rate!"

At which Ellen shook her head, not understanding.

"What does he mean, Ellen?"

"Who?—Oh, Ted Grove! Why, he means, he thinks you pretty, and oyster-like, too—he said so to me. I thought you were more up to fun, Janet. I suppose you were kept so strict with the old ladies, you don't understand having a beau. Don't you think he is handsome and clever?"

Janet did not answer—it was hopeless; but she resolved never to enter the Groves' house again; and, growing quieter, she inwardly compared the young man to Mr. Spencer. The dance at Miss Rose's—the picnic party—her first taste of the excitement of society—came vividly back to her. What a change! Yet even these people—respectable Mr. and Mrs. Grove—pitied her and Ellen, and out of pure kindness they invited them, the daughters of a convict!

Mrs. Grove had not smiled so contentedly, as she watched her son, but that she knew it was "only Ted's way." It would have made her very unhappy had he been serious. She would not like such a poor match for her only son, with his excellent prospects. Could Janet but have heard this

prudent mother's warning, "To be very careful, lest, while he meant a little play, the poor girl took it in earnest; for she seemed not much used to company, or the attention of young gentlemen"——!

Janet tried to induce her sister to withdraw from such society, assuring her it was far better to see and know no one; but this Ellen decidedly scouted, and sharply told Janet to go her own way, but let her alone. If she knew no one else, or better, whose fault was it? These people had been kind to her often, when she would otherwise have been lonely enough. If Janet chose to set up for being grand, and all that, well and good; but she must not think of dragging others with her. And, after all, Ellen wound up with—"It is not for us to hold ourselves too high, I fancy. If your friends were genteel, they only looked down on you; and what could they expect, with such a mother and such a father?"

Great was the relief when one day Mrs. French called to say that Mrs. Marsh would be happy to see Miss Nairn at once. The fact of some of the younger children being ill hastened the decision in Janet's favour, as Mrs. Marsh would be glad to have some one to keep the girls quiet in the schoolroom.

Janet was working busily that afternoon, to make her dress as presentable as possible, when a sharp rap on the door with a stick, was followed by a great shuffling, accompanied by sundry extraordinary noises, like grunting and puffing. Then the door opened, and a funny, wrinkled face, with wonderfully bushy and grey eyebrows, out of which gleamed a pair of small, piercing eyes, appeared.

A grunt, and a keen, searching look all round.

"Where is she—where's the missis, hey? And who may you be, hey? Oh, ay!—stepdaughter, I suppose? Eloped lately—hey?"

In spite of a little alarm, Janet could not help a smile, as she answered, indignantly: "I did not elope. I came away because I didn't choose to stay there."

"Hoity toity! Well, I declare!—beats the Queen Esther I saw on the stage to bits! You mite of a chit, what are you bouncing out at me in this way for? I won't have it! You're all alike—all gunpowder. But, hallo! what's this? The room is actually tidy!" And he screwed his eyes still more, and shifted his spectacles, as he took a careful survey, then glanced from the room to Janet. "This is your work, of course. I commend you. I wouldn't live in such a pigstye as it was for a thousand a year. Well! hope you approve of your home here, and find your relatives amicably disposed towards you? Got an affectionate welcome, I dare say! D'ye get enough to eat, I wonder? because I've my reasons for asking. Told the baker yonder to supply two loaves daily, on my account; likewise the butcher, a leg and a shoulder of mutton weekly. But not one shilling — no, not one penny — shall ever go from my pocket to hers again!—'twould be murder or manslaughter! She's bent on self-destruction—will die in the gutter, and be buried in the cross-roads—that is, she ought to be! As well take a rope and hang yourself as poison yourself; and she's killing herself. Ay,—you needn't stare! —(the chit hasn't bad eyes, by the way.) I say that your stepmother,—my niece (more's the pity), is a self-willed, wrong-headed, bad-hearted woman! She drove her fool of a husband to the dogs; then down she bundles here at my door, forsooth! whining to 'Uncle Green' to help her in sorrow.

Hang it! where did my money go? Didn't I get a house for her, and didn't she run into debt in three months? Didn't I pay for that young romp and hoyden, Ellen, for schooling? But the deuce a bit of benefit do I see come of it! I said I'd do no more—I said I'd come here no more till she reformed; and now comes one of my penitential notes—'unexpected distress'—'another to provide for'—'stepdaughter thrown away her bread and butter.' Couldn't make it out, and came to see for myself. What made you come here?—a nice home for a young girl, I suppose! so very safe and respectable."

"I—I am going to work for myself; I don't mean to be any burden on Mrs. Nairn."

"Indeed! Lady's-maid?—housemaid?"

"I am going to be daily governess, sir" (with dignity and importance).

"You are? More's the pity. Scrubbing floors far more respectable and pleasant. Not genteel, hey? And who has the honour to call you governess?"

"Mrs. Marsh. I am going there to-morrow."

"What are your wages, if I may ask? Come, I shall like you, I think. You're not like the other one. You've some spirit of the right sort. You'll find me crusty, but not rabid; and my bark is worse than my bite. So, so, you didn't make it out with that benevolent individual, Russell—isn't that the name? I made it my business to learn all I could about him when I found he was coming here so often. Ha! ha! Some men prefer a full-blown widow, you see! But there was no watch-dog wanted. An old-established trader—very well known. Has a bee in his bonnet, I fancy; or is bitten with a mania for getting rid of his money very easily. Uncommon fact, that a man no relation—a stranger one may

say—volunteered to allow a good sum. Well! I ain't a merchant. Doctors have plenty of work and little pay. I'm much obliged to my friend, and as he is a single man I won't grudge him the privilege. You understand? But pardon me—I don't see why you and he quarrelled?"

"We did not."

"Was he unkind?"

"No."

"Perhaps a little too kind, hey?"

"It was not about him at all. I didn't want to stay and be dependent on them. I always meant to work for myself when I could."

"Right! Well, good-bye. Don't tell my niece about this, and keep it snug to buy bread and butter, or anything else you may want most. Don't let her get a sight of it;" and rudely thrusting something into her hand, out he shuffled, grunting and groaning again.

Janet found, in a piece of soiled paper, a five-pound note.

"And so this is Mr. Green!" she thought. "He is much better than I expected; and he means to be kind, if he knew how."

CHAPTER XII.

SORROW AND JOY.

One afternoon Janet had been persuaded to take a long walk with her sister, in one of those lanes for which the city is famous. It was refreshing to linger by some gate and look over the sloping fields bordered with tall clipped elms, the rich verdure contrasting well with the deep red soil. It was a real holiday after a week's experience as a teacher, and her spirits rose, so that she laughed and chatted to Ellen. But a sudden stop was put to this, when they were joined by young Mr. Grove, Ellen evidently having given him a hint as to the direction they should take.

Janet insisted on going home by the most direct path, and walked before, apparently intent on gathering a nosegay from the hedge, leaving the others to themselves.

Mr. Grove, however, would not allow this, and he climbed the bank to break off a branch of mountain ash or a tempting wreath of briony, so that Janet could not avoid thanking him.

"Edward Grove has been at Wareham, and knows all about the Russells and those other people you told me of, Janet," remarked Ellen.

"Highly respectable, the Russells are," put in the young man, in a mincing voice. "O, I know him by sight as well as I do you! Not so long ago he came along our street; indeed, I think, Miss Ellen, he was not an unfrequent visitor of your mamma's. Pray has he called lately? I fancy there is a great attraction there now."

"Much obliged," said Ellen, angrily.

"No offence, Miss Ellen, I hope. But you see twice one makes two, don't it now?"

Janet tossed her head, though her heart sank at the thought that Mr. Russell was not likely now to come near the place.

"But he is not Janet's sweetheart after all!" said Ellen, with a laugh.

"O! I do remember hearing that it was supposed he would marry his cousin, a daughter of the attorney, Mr. Mitchell. Not very handsome, but I dare say there are good reasons," said the young man, carelessly.

"You never told us that, Janet," said Ellen, eagerly.

"No—because it isn't true."

"Indeed! Well, Miss, I adore plain speech, as all my friends know. And pray, Miss Janet, how do you like our city on the whole?"

Janet was glad to reach the streets, where there was less opportunity for questions.

They were walking on as briskly as the crowd of passengers would admit, when, on looking across the way, Janet saw Edward Mitchell.

She felt sure it was himself, and no other, from the cut of his best coat and hat to his way of swinging his cane. And he had seen her, too, she was sure, from his manner of staring

so resolutely straight before him, which was not like a Mitchell at all.

"So he cuts me!" she thought. "What will he say about my companion?" was the next feeling, prompting her to snub Mr. Grove more than ever.

It was provoking that she should have met any Wareham person just this very day! When they turned off from the High Street, she could not resist turning to assure herself that he was out of sight. No such thing! he was looking into a print-shop only a few doors away, his cane still swinging round and round. Evidently he was determined to find out where she went. After all he might mean to speak to her, and it made her a little nervous till she was at her stepmother's door.

That evening, imagination was busy in picturing the probable scene in the Mitchell home, when Edward told them his bit of news on his return. No doubt his quick observation had seen enough of young Grove to make a good story of what she had come to in the way of acquaintance. Bridget would moralise thereon, and Mrs. or Mr. Mitchell would be sure to speak of it to the Miss Russells.

When she had looked forward to working as a governess, she knew she must make up her mind to toil and drudgery, and to many a mortification; but she had not realised the being forced into the society of persons odious to her. That she should ever be subject to the attentions of such a man as Mr. Grove! She could not endure this. Solitude she thought she could bear very well, and she had made up her mind never to take part in the gay world or the usual pleasures of youth. But it seemed she was to be forced into company now. She must try to get a situation as resident governess in some nice

family. But how was this to be done? Would old Mr. Green help her, or should she advertise?

These thoughts perplexed and worried her perpetually for several days after the seeing Edward Mitchell. She was impatient with her pupils, and unusually sharp with her sister.

Never had life seemed more dismal than now, and one evening, when she was left alone in the little parlour, Janet was especially miserable and sad. Things were so different when seen in the haze of perspective, and coloured by the imagination, to the reality. What could she do to get away from the vulgar and coarse people she had fallen among? Some church bells were ringing a rejoicing peal, and the merry clash, and then the soft dying away of the notes, added to the feeling of oppression and sadness which the young girl had. She let her work fall unheeded, and, dropping her forehead on her hand, gave herself up to all the confused, mingled sensations excited by the influence of the moment.

Without, bright sunshine, which drew out numbers of people, as for a holiday; the rich colouring of the evening sky even turning the opposite roofs and chimneys into something like beauty;—and the distant hum of life, the cries of children at play, and those maddening bells, all combined to take off the sharp edge from her pressing troubles, and to lull her, as it were, in a dream, causing her pulses to throb, and her tears to flow, though she could not have explained exactly why. Past, present, and future, seemed to glide before her in bewildering procession, but if she tried to grasp at any one thought, it vanished. Her cheeks burned with excitement, and her grievances seemed lost in a thrilling sense of undefined hope.

She was very young, and easily moved. Already her life had seen many changes, and she had known sorrow and trouble. What was it that even now was whispering at her heart? Was it some association called up by the bells? The uncomfortable and despised parlour, with its narrow window of bad glass, was forgotten—her stepmother, Mr. Grove, Ellen—all was forgotten in a beautiful dream. How long it lasted she knew not, but she was suddenly awakened to reality by the sound of some one at the door. Then came a loud rap, and Janet hastily gathered up her sewing, and rallied her senses to receive Mr. Green.

The maid of all work was probably indulging in a little gossip from the back yard, with a neighbour, and Janet, in dread of arousing Mr. Green's anger, went herself to let him in. It was not Mr. Green—it was Mr. Russell!

Her first impulse was to run away, the next to throw herself into his arms; yet no one would have guessed at any impulse at all, or any emotion beneath her perfectly still and quiet manner. Only the colour, which had been so bright, faded away, and the lips were tightly drawn together. She made no exclamation. She tried to say, "How do you do?" but could not form the words. Her lips seemed glued together, and there was a painful tightness or swelling in her throat. He took her hand in his, also without speaking, but dropped it with half a shake, and then he walked forward quickly into the narrow passage, and raised his hat at the room door.

"Mamma is out," Janet managed to say then, as he looked back at her inquiringly. "Shall I send for her?"

"No, Janet, my visit is to you. I heard from Edward Mitchell that he had seen you here, and I concluded you had

come here to your mother. Had I not been ill I should have come sooner."

He spoke with evident effort, and in a constrained tone.

Janet made no answer. She could not; but resting her arms on the table, and then burying her face on them, all the pent-up or half-suppressed feelings of a month burst forth. From their violence now, might be judged the effort it must have cost her to subdue them.

He strode up and down the little room with heavy steps, shaking the glasses on the sideboard, and his pale face betraying great distress. But Janet was not one to give way beyond the first moment, before another. Soon she raised her head, and looked timidly up at him, but the sight of his altered face hurt her terribly.

"You are very angry, I see," she jerked out. "I expected it—yes; I knew it—and perhaps I deserve it, but indeed I didn't know what to do!"

After a pause he said, "There was some great mistake—we have all been wrong. But a little more openness would have saved much suffering, Janet!"

"I did say it at first—many times I said it. I told him, and I told your sisters; but then—afterwards—— Who could I be open with? No one cared: it was a good match, and urged on accordingly."

She spoke bitterly, carried on she knew not how, but her conscience smote her when he replied in a gentle, quiet tone—

"Do you really think that; or are you speaking hastily, unadvisedly?"

Sobs choked her voice now, though she tried to say, "No; I didn't mean it—at least not exactly. I am ungrateful, I

dare say, but I tried to school myself to feel as I ought, as was expected of me. No one can say I didn't try, and—and took time to consider. But it was no use. I may be something different from others—something very bad : perhaps I am. At all events, I could not force myself to—to wish to marry him. I tried to think it my duty to relieve you and your sisters of the burthen, and so—so—" a convulsive sob stopped the rest.

" And you really believed that I wished to be rid of you—that I considered you a burthen ? "

There was reproach mingled with the gentleness, and she felt a desire to throw herself at his feet, but restraining all demonstration, she only said, in a trembling, half-stifled voice, which was cold from the effort to be calm, and lacing her fingers tightly in a nervous way—

" I can't bear this ! "

" I was under a misapprehension altogether," he continued, not seeming to hear her exclamation. " I was deceived from beginning to end. I consented. God above knows with what a struggle ; but I consented, because I believed it for your happiness, Janet. Why did you not tell me ? Did I deserve such treatment from you ? "

A certain degree of severity gave emphasis to the last sentence. Janet had never seen him so excited or agitated. Presently he stopped short in his walk and looked at her. He seemed about to speak, but checked himself. She saw that he struggled with some deep feeling. Could it be anger ?

" You can never forgive me ! I have been only a trouble from first to last—a disgrace now ! " she said, in a broken, humble voice, and burying her face again in her hands.

"Never forgive you?" and he put his hand on her bowed head. "May God forgive me as I forgive you; and may I have as little to be forgiven, Janet!"

She drew down the hand, whose very touch had healing in it for her, and eagerly pressed it to her lips, murmuring—

"I meant no harm to any one; only to go away—to be out of everybody's way. And if you—if they—some of them at least—can forgive me, I will never trouble you again."

Then followed a short silence, only broken by his clearing his voice once or twice as if about to speak. At last, just touching her hand, he said cheerfully,

"It was a queer way of cutting the knot, certainly, and has given much pain. And so you did not like George Spencer? That seems very strange to me. Why was it? Could it be that——" He stopped suddenly, and stooped to look eagerly into her face.

Janet pulled her hand away from his and blushed scarlet. Then, with effort, she stammered out—

"I did like him! I liked and admired him in some ways. I was flattered, too, no doubt; and then he was very kind. They all were kind. I might, perhaps, have liked him better. I don't know, but perhaps I might, only—only—"

"Only?" he eagerly repeated, stooping over her so that she felt his breath on her head.

"Only what?" he again repeated. "Speak, Janet," but she only sat shivering, as it seemed, though her face was burning.

They both breathed fast and hard, and there was one brief moment of intense agitation, not consciously felt then, but to be remembered always, and then he drew himself quite

upright, and turning half away from her, he again asked the question, repeating the same words, "Only what?" but in his usual quiet tone and manner: "Won't you tell me, Janet?" Then, as her agitation increased outwardly, he added in a lighter tone, "A woman's reason, was it? Because you couldn't? Eh, was that it?"

Still she did not answer.

"Then there was that very sweet girl, so fond of you, and as I always believed your real and true friend. Didn't you love Agnes—Miss Spencer, Janet? She spoke, indeed she speaks still, in such handsome terms of you, making all excuses and giving no blame—an example to us all! I confess I don't understand it at all. I was repeatedly assured that all was well, that is, that you—— that he——"

"Yes, of course—she—Agnes no doubt did think so," Janet put in abruptly. "And all was right," she added, in a hard, defiant tone, holding her throat as if to still some pain there. "Every one was right but me, I am the only one wrong. It is my own doing entirely. I wish to bear the blame, as I must bear the consequences."

"Would you come home?" he asked, eagerly; "would you return at once? I——"

"Not for the world! Never! No, whatever I may have to bear, that I will never do."

There was a look of great pain in his face, and he sighed as he turned away a little. "You must have suffered much—you have been very unhappy, then, with us, Janet?"

But she made no answer. Perhaps he understood her silence, for his whole bearing showed how grieved he was.

After a little time Mr. Russell said, "Your stepmother cannot afford to give you a comfortable home. She is not

rich, I know. Of course that is easily remedied, only—perhaps, Janet, I had better give you——" He stopped and hesitated, looking at her doubtfully. "The fact is," he went on presently, "your stepmother is not a particularly good manager, poor thing. She has no doubt been accustomed to more money. I dare not trust your comfort to her. So you must allow me, in the only poor way you have left in my power, to help you a little."

He drew out his pocket-book, but Janet flushed up.

"No, no, Mr. Jacob, I don't want anything. I am not going to take anything, thank you."

"Nonsense. That is carrying pride too far. I tell you, Janet, Mrs. Nairn finds it hard work to pay her way at present. It is simply impossible for her to provide properly for you. It is my place and my duty, for did I not adopt you, Janet, long ago? Besides, why talk of duty? Can't you understand, child, that it will be my dear pleasure? I have plenty of money; but who have I to spend it on? Surely—surely you can't be so unkind, so unforgiving as to deprive me of this one small pleasure?"

"It is not pride exactly," she said, with eyes bent on the ground. "But, you see, I am a governess now, and earning something, though not much. Then I do help here and save a little, and soon I shall gain more and cost my mother nothing at all."

"But till then?"

"The fact is," she said, speaking fast and her lips quivering, "I know very well that you help now, and have done so a long time. It was not enough that I was a dependent and living on you, but you were asked for more. I know it! Pride! there is little room for that, I am sure. But for

myself, as long as I can I will try to work. Miss Russell spoke truly long ago. I feel that now. I can't help your giving to others, but not to me—not now—not again."

Mr. Russell again turned away, and went to the little window. She could not see his face.

"Besides," she added, in a lower and less assured tone, "if you have no one now, that need not be long. You will not want for claims."

"Perhaps not," he answered, drily. "Well, Janet, have you any message?"

"For whom?"

"For your nice little friend, Agnes Spencer. I shall be cross-questioned, and——"

"Say then that I am quite well and happy," she interrupted; "that is, if she cares to know."

"You are happy then, Janet?"

"Yes, I think so; I mean," she added, correcting herself, "that I think I am growing more able to suit myself to circumstances. I don't expect so much; and then I have one hope before me with all the troubles."

"You have troubles, then, even here? Then, why is this so much better than Queen's Terrace, I wonder? Was there anything I was not aware of? You will greatly oblige me by speaking out."

"The truth is, I was a miserable, heart-crushed child, when you first took me, who had once been indulged, and almost idolised by—— I was very proud and wilful, and yet—yet—always craving for love—for some one to love—and—then——"

"Then?" he repeated. "Were you going to say there was was no one you could love, or who loved you?"

"I was not loveable. Betty always seemed to love me, I think."

"And only Betty?"

"I thought so sometimes;—I don't know," she answered, in much agitation, and hiding her face.

"You were misunderstood, provoked by unkind allusions, was that it, Janet?"

"Yes, partly. I don't think your sisters understood me, and they sometimes forgot I was not really the beggar pauper I seemed to be."

"Too true, child! I was much to blame then for——"

"You? O no! you need not blame yourself. If you only knew—— But you mustn't say that. O no, never you!"

Mr. Russell turned and looked out of window again very intently for some moments; then he said in a low, constrained voice, "You spoke of a hope. May I ask what this is?"

"Yes, I hope to go out to my father as soon as I can save money for my passage."

"Go to him—go to Australia! You alone! Impossible! madness! At least I ask as a favour that you take no steps without asking me—letting me know. You will promise this, Janet?"

He took her hand as he asked this, and she did promise, and her eyes for a moment were bent on his earnest face, but then they fell, and again her varying colour mounted high.

He stooped towards her, clasping her hand in both his, and seemed about to speak, when a short loud knock at the street door startled her.

"It is Mr. Green!"

He let go her hand, and she hastily went towards the door,

when another knock sounded. Mr. Russell followed her into the passage, and laid his hand on her head, in his old way.

"God bless you, child; I will try to see you again soon."

He opened the door, and as he went out, not Mr. Green, but a man with a smutty face, and a sack of coals on his back, came in. As he passed on to the yard, Janet flew to the window in time to catch a last look at the tall, large figure, as he strode on, his eyes on the ground. Then with a sigh she turned to pay the man for the coals.

Directly after this Mrs. Nairn came in, tired and fretful, wishing her tea was ready, and complaining of the heat and dust. Then Ellen came, and her presence did not mend matters. She and her mother had a hot argument, which at any other time would have annoyed Janet, and made her unhappy. But just then a sunbeam had come athwart her path, and all was comparatively bright with its golden light. It cheered her through the duties of the evening, and through the teaching on the morrow; but yet with the pleasure there was deep sadness. And Janet hastened over all she had to do, eagerly impatient to find herself alone, and at liberty to examine and weigh every word and look. Her heightened colour attracted Mrs. Nairn's notice.

"What have you done to yourself? you look quite pretty, I declare," she said. "'Tis a pity you haven't always such a nice pink colour. That was my great point—my complexion."

"All gone now," remarked Ellen, rudely. "But what has happened to you, Janet, eh?"

"I have had a nice rest—and—then Mr. Russell has been here."

"Indeed! And is he very offended and angry? Did he offer to take you again?" asked Mrs. Nairn.

"I wouldn't—I couldn't go for anything."

"Ah—you'll say something else a month hence, when you are tired of teaching. Well, I'm glad the old fellow has been here at any rate, and he's welcome to come again. What a silly girl you have been in throwing away your chance, to be sure! Why, really I should not be surprised if you had married well—and any way you would have been provided for. They were bound to do that. He's rolling in riches, I have heard; but they don't spend much. There'll be a nice picking for somebody one day. I suppose he is sure not to marry at this time of day?"

"On the contrary, I believe he will very soon marry," Janet said, in an abrupt way.

"Who's the lady?" asked Mrs. Nairn, while Ellen laughed and clapped her hands.

"Shouldn't I like to hear him make love! Bless his respectable bald head and shabby coat. La, now, mamma, look at Janet! If I don't believe that you are the destined Mrs. Jacob, Janet! What a joke!"

"Stranger things have happened," languidly observed Mrs. Nairn, leaning back, and yawning; "and I am sure I won't refuse my consent."

"Thank you!" returned Janet, tossing her head. "But it will never be needed. Mr. Russell has better taste than to—to—stoop to a beggar!"

"As to that, he is rich enough to choose; and, really, Janet, if you like, you are not so bad looking. If you would keep down your temper and study your manners a little, and had a little style, and were taller, and had more colour, you——"

"Might run a chance of being honoured," she interrupted, bitterly. "But I tell you Mr. Russell admires beauty; fair, golden hair, blue eyes—'style,' as you call it—fashionable clothes, and so on. And though you laugh at him and call him old, I can assure you quite popular and admired young ladies feel flattered if he talks to them—and—and—very soon there will be a Mrs. Russell—a young, beautiful Mrs. Russell, too!"

But in trying to smile at the last sentence, Janet nearly broke down, and was glad to make some excuse to leave the room. When she returned, her mother and Ellen were talking eagerly about quite a different subject.

Mrs. Nairn, rested and refreshed, was pleased to speak of her youthful days and enumerate her conquests, sighing now and then that her daughter would have no such advantages or opportunity.

"Not even a ball or a race for you. But surely those old antediluvians took or sent *you* to balls, Janet?"

"Meaning the Miss Russells, I suppose?" returned Janet, sharply. "Well, I did go to one dance."

"O, tell us all about it," said Ellen. "Was it fine? Did you get partners?"

"What did you wear?" put in Mrs. Nairn.

"Yes, it was very pleasant," Janet said, softly, with a dreamy look coming into her eyes, as she thought of that evening.

"But your dress, Janet?" said her stepmother.

"Well, my dress was a white silk with blue stripes, and pearls in my hair; not real pearls, but beads, of course."

"I should think with their money they might have afforded you real pearls. I had a lovely set given me on my

birthday by your poor father. Pearls were his favourite ornaments always. I don't agree with him. I admire diamonds first, and then rubies or emeralds."

"Well, we *are* getting grand, talking so glibly of pearls, diamonds, and rubies," laughed Ellen.

"But I should hardly have given those old maids credit for so much taste, for your dress must have been pretty and elegant. Did they plan it?" asked Mrs. Nairn.

"O no! Mr. Russell got it; but I fancy, indeed I am sure that—that a friend chose it—and she dressed my hair, too."

Janet bent her head to hide a blush which would come.

"Look!" said the provoking Ellen, "if she isn't blushing! Come, who was this friend?"

"No one you ever heard of," returned Janet. "Shall we have a stroll this fine evening, Ellen?"

"Certainly—but tell us first who was your friend. It must have been a close friendship for her to settle your hair."

"It was a Miss Spencer — people visiting Wareham. There—now you know. Let us put on our bonnets."

* * * * * *

"Oh this is such a dull road, Janet; one never meets any one here."

"All right," was Janet's answer. "Understand, Ellen, I will not subject myself to be joined in my walks by just anybody. I come out for refreshment; not to have my temper worried by vulgar coxcombs."

"Coxcomb! and vulgar! I only wish the Groves could hear you; or, rather, I hope they never may. Well, there's no accounting for taste, indeed! You seemed as pleased as possible with that old fellow's visit, and——"

"Was I? Well, I shall be only too happy to leave you to enjoy your friend's society all to yourself. He does not happen to suit my taste. A poor teacher I must be—many things I must put up with, but to be followed by a Mr. Grove! Never!"

Ellen laughed.

"Edward Grove said you ought to go on the stage, Janet; and indeed you don't know how you speak like an actress. But now, tell me—what did your particular friend say? I hope he offered to maintain you here, though of course I am too wide awake to name such a thing before mamma. He wouldn't like his little pet plaything to drudge at teaching, I am sure. Eh, Janet?"

"Whether he likes it or not, she is going to work, Ellen."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MISS RUSSELLS.

"How pale Jacob is!" remarked Miss Anna Russell, as she looked up from her work and saw her brother pass the window on his way to the counting-house.

"Nonsense, Anna, he is quite well now. Of course Jacob is not as young as he was. People must grow old. What does a man want of a colour, I should like to know?" and Miss Russell looked over her spectacles defiantly.

"Oh, no, I prefer a pale complexion; it is so much more interesting. Why, I think a high colour is vulgar in a gentleman. But as to Jacob growing old, sister, that is nonsense, pardon me. And you really should not be always saying so. People will believe him to be really old, and then——"

"They will think you and I still older," interrupted Miss Russell, with a grim smile, as if she rather enjoyed the joke.

"Jacob is not old; not at all old," asserted Anna, with sundry shakes of the corkscrews, and applying such vigorous squeezes to the pincushion she was stuffing, till at last some of the bran fell on the carpet.

"There now, see what you have done, Anna! How

heedless you are, to be sure! Any one might think you were not out of your teens, at any rate. How many pincushions have you made already, and what possible use can you find for any more?"

"Oh, never mind! I know what I am about. And this is destined for a certain event which it doesn't need great acumen to see looming in the distance."

"Mercy on us! Where do you get your fine words? And pray what event do you see in what a stuffed pincushion can have anything to do?"

"Do you mean to say, sister, that you don't see what is going on, and has been going on, oh, ever so long? You—with your penetration, and all under your very eyes?"

"If you mean to allude to that ridiculous fantastical flirtation Jacob has been fool enough to keep up, you may as well speak out. But as to calling that an event, I deny it. It will never come to that, Anna—never, never!"

"And why not?"

"Why? Why, because firstly, Jacob is too old to think of such a thing, and he has no right to be playing the fool at this time of day."

"Oh! but, sister, pardon me, that is ridiculous, and you know it in your heart. Jacob is not one bit too old to marry. Just the proper age, many persons think. I assure you there are people who admire him very much. You and I may wonder at it—but——"

"And why should we wonder at it? Do you mean to affirm that Jacob is not a very well-made man, and quite good-looking enough for any Christian? I am ashamed of you, Anna, to lower your own brother—and a very good brother to you, I am sure, though he has his faults,

and plenty of them, as who should know so well as I do?"

"But I don't wish to lower him, sister. I always make a point of praising him, and pointing out all his darling, delightful ways. Ask Miss Eleanor Spencer if I haven't praised him to her. Why, he has really become quite the fashion, as dear Mrs. Spencer said one day: and we all know what and who has drawn him out so. Why, she adores him—she is never happy unless he is at her side."

"Pack of stuff!"

"Then there is Mrs. Mitchell—would you prefer her daughters? They would turn heaven and earth——"

"Don't be profane, Anna."

"Well, they would do anything only to get Bridget to be Jacob's wife. Mrs. Mitchell is constantly saying how sensible and how prudent she is. 'Just the very wife for your absent brother,' she said to me only yesterday."

"Just like her impertinence!"

"Though I dare say they would be just as pleased if he doesn't marry at all; for then they expect to get some of his—of our money—being our nearest relations, they say."

"Heard I ever the like of that!" exclaimed Miss Russell, wrathfully. "Rather than that, Jacob shall marry to-morrow! As if he hadn't the right to get a wife, and have a dozen children if he pleases! Do you mean to say that he is obliged to stoop to that Bridget—that awkward, stupid Bridget? Do you mean to tell me—me, his sister, and almost his mother—that Jacob can't take his stand with any one? yes, any one; and that pretty girls—belles as they call them—and people of consideration too, are not glad and proud of his notice? Yes, and seek him too in a way which

in my day a girl would not have thought quite proper. Bridget forsooth! Why Jacob wouldn't look at her! Jacob, who was such a beautiful baby and a handsome lad—and now, there isn't a man in the county can beat him, though I say it. And then, look at the lot of books he has read. Not that I approve of such ways, but it catches the silly butterflies; and rather than that Mrs. Mitchell should succeed in her vulgar, mean, scheming ways, I'll insist on Jacob's marrying Agnes Spencer at once."

"Provided she says 'yes,'" put in Anna, with a smile, and stooping to put the last stitches to her fat pincushion.

"Why, she has said 'yes' a hundred times, with her eyes if not with her tongue. And you must have been strangely absent not to have seen it, Anna. Not that I wish him to marry. I don't like it at all. I wish people would leave us alone. Jacob is not fit to marry."

"No, I really don't think he is, sister; and a very funny husband he'll make; and as to a lover, why, I can't fancy him courting one bit, can you?"

"And why not? Courting, as you call it, is folly. A man shouldn't demean himself by such ridiculous nonsense. But as to a husband, in what way, pray, is he deficient? The Spencers are respectable, and, as things go, they are pleasant enough. Yes, rather than that Mrs. Mitchell should triumph over me, it shall be the Spencers."

"But what will that poor, dear young man say to it? How will he ever bear coming among us again, after being served in such a scandalous way? and he is heart-broken still, Eleanor tells me, and can't forget her, or blame her either."

"Pray who does he blame then?"

"I don't know. Perhaps no one. But do you know, sister, I have a shrewd idea that our dear, sly, eccentric brother knows where Ja—, where that dreadful girl is, and that he has been to see her too."

"Been to see her! Anna, do you mean to strike me down? And when did he go to see her, pray; and how do you know this?"

"Well, don't excite yourself, sister, and perhaps I ought not to have told you."

"Ought not to have told me! What! I am to be deceived and deluded, and cheated in my old age, then, by those I have slaved for all my life!"

"Really, sister, you do use such strong expressions, it quite upsets me. Well, this is what I heard, and I just advise you to let it alone; for though Jacob is easily managed in general, we both know there are times when you might as well try to turn the waves on the beach. And this is one of those times, if I am not mistaken."

"Will you, or will you not, go on and say what you have to say? You may leave me to act with regard to Jacob. I believe I know every bit of him, inside and outside, and as to not managing him whenever I see fit, that is just ridiculous nonsense."

"Well, then, one day Edward Mitchell went to Exeter."

"Yes. Not a very unusual event, that."

"But wait——. In Exeter—in the street somewhere—I think High Street——"

"Never mind High or Low Street."

"Well, he saw—that is, he thought he recognised her. And then he pretended to be looking into a shop-window."

"Just like a Mitchell; there's deceit in their blood."

"And he watched 'her' all the time. And he saw her go down somewhere in St. Thomas'; saw her go into a house. And then he went by the house and found out the number. And he told his people, and——"

"And of course they told all Wareham. They are born gossips."

"And Jacob heard of it."

"Of course—that chattering magpie, Betty, repeated it to him. But I'll be down upon her for her folly."

"As soon as he was well enough he went to Exeter. You remember he was away one day last week, and how pale and ill he looked that evening and all next day? I am sure he went there and saw——"

"Then it's all up with him! Mark my words, Anna. Jacob has set his foot in a trap, and he'll be a doomed man."

"Ah, but I hope he will marry Agnes Spencer, and that will save him."

"I don't know—I don't know;" and Miss Russell sank into silence. With her head more bent than Anna remembered to have seen it, her sister remained in deep thought for a long time, so long that Anna grew tired, and put up her work and left the room.

But when she looked in at the door half an hour after, to say she was going out for a little, Miss Russell was in the same attitude, nor did she make any answer, or notice her sister's observation.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DAILY GOVERNESS AT WORK.

There is little use in entering into the details of Janet's daily teaching at Mr. Marsh's. It is enough to say that she found it trying and uphill work, as her pupils were backward and far from bright. But she summed up all her best energy and patience, and bore magnanimously with the false notes and impossible tune of the music-lesson to two little girls, who had not half an ear between them, and cried regularly through the lesson.

Once when Janet indulged herself with playing a favourite air before quitting the piano-forte, she was extremely annoyed by the eldest girl's saying aside, but loud enough for Janet to hear,—

"If ma' were to hear Miss Nairn she would be very angry. She said it was very impertinent of Miss Cox."

Then Mr. Marsh peeped in. Janet had not learned to like her pupils' father, and directly rose from her seat.

"Pray don't give up, Miss Nairn. I was drawn here by the sweet sounds, I assure you. I am devotedly fond of music, and it is a great treat to hear it. You will greatly oblige me by continuing a little."

What could she do but comply with this request? So the French reading was put off while the teacher not unwillingly played little choice bits from Mozart and Rossini, and Mr. Marsh, while looking over a newspaper, joined his whistle *con amore*. But, meanwhile, no one had observed Miss Matilda Marsh leave the room, and it was with a very uncomfortable feeling that Janet presently saw the door open, opposite to her, and Mrs. Marsh's very angry face appear.

"Mr. M.!—I am astonished!—I really am! I deemed you were occupied with your luncheon. It did not enter my imagination that you would come here, to this room, and interrupt the children's studies, and encourage Miss Nairn in neglecting them for her own pleasure."

Here Janet shut the piano-forte with a sharp bang, while her cheeks flushed crimson, and she bit her lips lest she should answer unbecomingly.

"My dear, I really don't see that there is any impropriety or harm in Miss Nairn's obliging me with a few airs. I requested her to play."

"I am sorry for it, Mr. M. Of course if it is your will to occupy the time of the governess when she is paid for teaching the children, I can't prevent it. All I can do is to remonstrate, and point out what I consider the extreme impropriety, not to say indelicacies of the proceeding. And if Miss Nairn chooses to go against me, and listen to your flattering compliments, all I can say is, she will sink in my opinion very low indeed. Of course I don't know what she may consider proper, or what she may have been taught is the duty of a governess paid for doing one thing, but choosing to neglect that for something else. But I repeat I am sorry for her, and sorry for you, Mr. M."

"You need not be, my dear; Miss Nairn has already shut up the instrument, and from her countenance I dare not plead again. I think you are mistaken, and shall prove it to you, and some other day I shall try and prove it to Miss Nairn also. For the present I obey your wishes, and wish Miss Nairn a very good morning and many thanks for her clever performance."

With a bow and a smile, which Janet resented, because she thought it was impertinent, Mr. Marsh left the room, and his wife rustled out after him, looking back in a gloomy and displeased way at Janet and the children.

Matilda was trying to hide a smile of triumph, and the others whispered together till Janet called them to order, and as quietly as she could resumed the regular lessons.

But after this morning's occurrence things became more unpleasant: Mr. Marsh so often came in when the girls were taking their music lesson, professing to take eager interest in their progress. He never could persuade Janet to play to him again, but his style of conversation annoyed her. Then Mrs. Marsh grew discontented, and repeated remarks she had heard, to the intent that the Liffey's children were so much more advanced than hers, though they only went to a large school. Miss Liffey, aged ten years, had played an air with variations at an evening party, and her sister had repeated some long poem, almost as well as a player. Then she had seen such lovely copper-plate writing of a little boy —so different from her Albert's copies! and so on.

Once Janet was provoked to say, "Madam, I do the best I can, but it is not in my power to give your daughters a good ear or to make them clever. They are backward and inattentive, and I find it difficult to enforce obedience. But

if you are not satisfied I can resign at the end of the month."

This however Mrs. Marsh did not want at all, for she knew she could not get so much for so little pay elsewhere ; and Janet went on day after day for six weeks.

Often, as she walked homewards, feeling very weary, and dreading the return to her stepmother's and sister's perpetual squabbles, she wished that Mr. Russell would pay his promised visit. She had tried hard to persuade herself that she did not wish to see him again—not for a long, long time ! It was more pain than pleasure. Better to be entirely separated, and try to forget it all ! But it would not do—she longed, till it was actual pain, for the sound of his deep-grave voice, for the touch of his hand. Why did he not come ?

And then, as the days came and passed without bringing him, she hated any small added comfort which was provided in their living. She refused to partake of some chicken and ham which one day Mrs. Nairn ordered for dinner, being, as she exultingly said, flush of money for a wonder. And when her stepmother bought new dresses for herself and Ellen, and then in the burst of her satisfaction offered also to give one to Janet, she said haughtily she had rather go in rags than be under obligation to any one, especially to people who looked down on them, and cast them aside ! For Janet knew well where Mrs. Nairn's money came from. "Uncle Green" had written a furious letter with the last quarterly remittance, threatening if he heard of any more bills left unpaid he would stop the supplies entirely.

Then one morning Ellen chose to run away from school rather than submit to some forfeit for misconduct. No persuasions from Janet or her mother would induce her to

give up and go back. She was sick of it. She didn't care a rap for old Dry Bones. He would soon get over it when he found her firm, and he must do something for her she said.

But he did not get over it at all. He spoke his mind in the plainest terms, and upbraided his niece, Mrs. Nairn, with her folly and misconduct from first to last. One chance more and only one would he give that romp, and ill-conducted young girl. He would pay for her apprenticeship to Mrs. Nunly, a first-rate and most respectable dressmaker. But on her refusing the offer, or behaving ill after accepting it, he would entirely give her up, and not only her, but the whole lot of them.

This brought miserable scenes to pass at home. Mrs. Nairn lamenting over the hard fate which doomed her daughter to be a dressmaker! And then scolding Ellen in no mild terms, alternately with bitter allusions to her "scapegrace of a husband. She might thank him for all she had to endure—she a lady born—to be reduced to this!"

Janet resented such a speech, and would remind her stepmother that there were two sides to the story—that her father was unfortunate and not wicked, and that it was Ellen's own fault, for had she behaved well she might have remained at school.

"Yes, to end in being a governess, I suppose!" retorted Mrs. Nairn.

"O I dare say she would have lived on—on the bounty of others, for that matter," Janet was provoked to say.

"Your father ought to send some money if he had a scrap of feeling. Fancy him there quite at his ease, living in comfort and dressing well, and I dare say keeping a carriage.

A pretty contrast to the state he has left his wife and children in !"

It was not till the very morning on which Mr. Green had said he should call to hear the decision, that Ellen gave in with a bad grace, and told her mother to say she would go to Mrs. Nunly ; but she wouldn't face the old Cross-bones. She was going to spend the day with her school friend, Emma Grove, whose brother had of late transferred his attentions from "the little actress," as he called Janet, to Ellen.

Mrs. Nairn was ill, owing to her anxiety and suspense, she said, though Ellen winked at her sister, and said she never heard of anxiety making any one giddy.

It fell to Janet to receive the formidable Mr. Green.

The little bent, but wiry man, whose face seemed made up of puckers and wrinkles, always began by being strictly on the defensive, and apparently did his best to say disagreeable things ; and so as Janet, according to promise, repeated Mrs. Nairn's message word for word, he snarled out—

"The less we talk of gentility the better I should say ; for whatever there was of the article is perished. Feelings, indeed ! What are they ? Do they feed you, or clothe you? Throw them away is my advice, or leave them for those who know how to use them. A very expensive luxury I can tell you. Now mark me, young lady. By the way, you are the other brood—the father's pet child, aint you ? What's your name ? "

"Janet."

"I know, I know ! A fancy name. Well, you deserve a better one, for I don't dislike your looks, or your manner, though you do carry your ridiculously small head rather proudly. I wonder where your brains are packed, for you

have some, I fancy. However 'tis an improvement, and I see an improvement in the house too. Your handywork, of course, eh? You perceive I am by no means blind. Bless you! nothing escapes me. I can read into people's secret hearts more than they think for. No doubt you have heard of me as one of the Philistines, a sort of Goliath of Gath, or perhaps a Shylock. A hard man. Well, well, I don't deny it. I am hard, deuced hard, to some people. But young girl, you're not a coward. I see you don't cringe or tremble at the ogre. You may find that my bark is worse than my bite. And pray where is my niece? In bed? Is she ill again? Ah, she's killing herself rapidly. I have warned her. She will die before many months are out unless she stops short. In great pain you say? Well, take this to the chemist in this street and make her take it. Are you going to stop and nurse her?"

"If it is necessary I must and I will, but I ought to go to my pupils."

"Pupils! you! Who would hire such a small thing for a teacher,—and pray what makes you so fond of the occupation?"

"I hate it, sir, but I hate being dependent much more."

"Good! Right, very right. By the way I remember now. You were living with some rich people. And may I ask why you left them? O, I see the colours are displayed in double quick time! Well, well, I ask no secrets; but if I may be so bold I will observe, that I suppose that is where the money comes from. I guess she (and he pointed towards the bedroom with his thumb to indicate his niece) knows where to go a fishing, but there are debts still. Get them paid, young lady—get every penny paid. And now, if you are alarmed,

and I warn you, she might get worse suddenly, you can send for me. Stay here if you can. It is your duty before teaching ologies and nonsense to fools. Stay here, and tell that other—that very steady, promising young Miss, that I expect her to present herself at her future mistress's house this very day week, punctually, without fail; and that she will conduct herself soberly and well when there, or as sure as my name is Green she may go to Jericho for me. I will have nothing more to say to her afterwards. Good morning."

CHAPTER XV.

HIS BARK WORSE THAN HIS BITE.

Mrs. Nairn did not get better notwithstanding Mr. Green's prescription: she grew worse, and Janet was obliged to excuse herself from attending to her pupils one morning and remain to nurse her stepmother.

On the following day when she rang at Mrs. Marsh's door, Janet was told that "Missis and the young ladies were gone out for the day, but there was a bit of a note left in case Miss Nairn called."

Janet read the note as she walked back, rather wondering at Mrs. Marsh taking a second holiday, but also rejoicing in her freedom, for she was tired, and felt that Mrs. Nairn needed some one to be with her:

Any one watching her face as she rapidly ran her eyes over the stiff elaborately sharp and flourishing writing, would have seen the hot blood flash up to her very hair, while she bit her curling lips and kept her head more erect than usual. Then Janet crushed the note in her hand and walked on rapidly.

"Ah! Agnes warned me! This is the pleasure of being a governess! Insolence!—vulgarity! Well, after all, 'tis

hardly much worse than what I used to feel at Queen's Terrace, under Miss Russell's severe words, or Miss Anna's intolerable patronising caresses. I have made my own bed, as they say, and must lie on it. It is, at least, my own choosing, and I'll not turn back at the first rough weather. If I could but get an introduction to set me afloat to some nice family—not among this kind of people! But now I must go back and try to get Mrs. Nairn well again, and be content to eat and drink at her expense, as she says, or rather on the alms she stoops to beg for. It is galling—it turns the food to poison for me; but for the present I can't help myself."

Something in this way Janet's thoughts ran, and sometimes a word actually rose to her lips, and was half uttered. To her stepmother's surprised questions at her quick return, she said, shortly:—

"Yes, a holiday. Mrs. Marsh, hearing I was detained yesterday through the illness of a relation, kindly allows me to devote myself to the duties of a nurse. Mrs. Marsh is of the opinion that two duties cannot be performed together, and kindly gives me permission to stay at home."

"Indeed! And for how long?"

"Oh, quite an indefinite time!—that is, in plain speech, I am dismissed. Mr. Marsh will calculate what is owing to me, and send me a cheque for the mighty sum! I hope it will buy me a pair of boots, for these have something very like holes in them!"

"Dismissed!" repeated Mrs. Nairn, "and you sit there joking about it! And you are turned away, and must live wholly at my expense! You are cool, I must say."

"I shall do my best to find more work; meanwhile, as

you ought to have a nurse, you can consider me in that light. I shall at least be earning my board, I hope."

"You are a cruel girl, Janet, to talk in that way. But you never did care for hurting my feelings; nor did your father, and you take after him. It is easy to twist one's words into all sorts of meanings, when a poor woman lies so miserably ill. As to getting work, it is easy to say so; but you'll find it harder than you think for; and at the best, governesses are ill paid, and it is drudgery work. My advice is for you to offer yourself at Miss Vilney's, or some other millinery business. I've heard some of them will give ever so much to any one with a face and figure to set off their fashions. You could do that if you chose to, and if you would command your temper, and put on a pleasant manner to customers——"

"Thank you; but I prefer the drudgery of teaching."

"Aye, but you can't get enough to find you in clothes so, and I am sure you would be well paid in the other way. 'Tis your pride; but what's the use of pride now? There's Ellen gone to a dressmaker's. Your father has brought us all into the mud—all his fault—and we are the real sufferers."

Mrs. Nairn here began to sob, and Janet overcame the impulse to answer what she felt an unjust accusation against her father, and tried to speak more hopefully than she felt as to the prospect of her getting more pupils.

Mr. Green called again, and found out that Janet was out of employment. Screwing up his eyes till they were hidden under his shaggy white eyebrows, he surveyed her for some moments in silence; then, holding up his hands, he said: "Mercy on us! what a bit it is! Can't say you are grown fatter since you came here. I say, tell me, does she starve you now? Does she worry you too much?" Then, seeing

Janet's look of surprise, he added: "You are pale, sallow, and thin. That's the effect. Now for the cause. Well, it might, of course, be the usual young lady's ailment, vulgarly called 'love;' but it may also be something else, and I believe it is something else in this case. Bless you! there's no need to shirk the truth to me. I know as well as any one what *she* is—once a fine girl, for all that; but it didn't tell much for your father's discrimination that he made her his wife. She always was a blister to her friends, and always will be; and now, of course, it is worse than ever. On my conscience, now, I believe she frets you sick?"

"Not exactly; but I am as anxious as she is to find work, and be independent."

"Independent! Ah, you're proud! Well, and is it the highly-desirable and delightful situation of a governess you are seeking? Good gracious! it beats me. What can induce so many women to be governesses?"

"Because they must work; and what else can they do, sir?"

"Well, and can you undertake French, German, Italian, and thorough—mark me, thorough—knowledge of English? Can you teach painting, *alias* daubing, and playing, *alias* strumming? Can you give a proper manner, and show them how to do embroidery, and such trifles?"

Janet laughed. "No, indeed, I cannot do half as much; and if it is really required, I must give it up, and——"

"And what then?"

"Well, I can be a servant, I suppose."

"I suppose no such thing. What! can you scrub floors and polish grates with those absurd hands? Can you cook in the French style, or can you carry about a child as big as yourself?"

"I must hope, sir, that some one may be found who will be satisfied with less accomplishments, and that I may again be a teacher. But the worst is, I have no friends to help me."

"Nonsense! There's myself, for one. And, pray, won't those Russells do anything to further your efforts for independence?"

"No; I would not ask them."

"Ah!—indeed! Well, I don't understand it. There's some mystery at the bottom; for as to swallowing the little neat story my niece had ready for me—couldn't do it at all—'tis against probability! By the way, the Russells are rich, I conclude?"

"I don't know. I should think not."

"Oh! Well, well! I'll inquire, and if I do hear of any one who is satisfied with something less than a prodigy of learning—well, I'll let you know. But don't fret—don't get thin, and pale, and ugly. I wouldn't, if I were you, really."

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. EVERLY SMYTHE.

Mrs Everly Smythe was a young widow, just invalid enough to claim her right of exemption from all disagreeable duties, and to recline gracefully on a sofa; and just pretty enough to set off a new bonnet or cap, and pass as a "beauty." She had two little girls, for whose education she sought a governess. But Mrs. Everly Smythe also wished to combine something of a companion in the same person—or, to say truly, she wished the same salary to pay for both, and to make that salary as small as possible. Captain Smythe had died very suddenly, and left his widow only moderately provided for, with expensive tastes and habits, as well as sundry unpaid debts. It required skill and management to provide all the comforts, and little, but expensive elegancies, which Mrs. Everly Smythe needed. She could not do without her "own maid," so invaluable in her taste for dressing hair and trimming a bonnet. But this maid demanded high wages, so the governess must be content with less. There were dozens of poor, young women wanting a home and just enough to buy their clothes. She could not put up with anything short of a lady for her girls; and if this lady could play and sing well

enough to help to amuse Mrs. Everly Smythe's guests, and soothe her own nerves, all the better. "She must not be too pretty, you know, because that leads to flirting, and all that; and so very improper an example for the children, you know. But, again, I can't abide an ugly, gauche creature, with brusque movements and a loud voice."

So Mrs. Everly Smythe's friends busied themselves with seeking the person who should be not too pretty, but pretty enough—a lady, yet content to earn less than a lady's maid—accomplished in music, and competent to prepare two girls for a finishing, fashionable school by-and-by, and the supreme honour of being the daughters of the elegant and interesting Mrs. Everly Smythe! As it so chanced that one of these obliging friends was an acquaintance of Mr. Green's, he heard of this search for a cheap governess; and, after ascertaining that Janet was still unsuited, and also growing still thinner, and paler, and graver, in her stepmother's home, he ventured to propose this place to her, adding, dryly,—

"The lady's-maid's place would be a better thing, I know; and, besides, there would probably be a good picking among Mrs. Smythe's left-off gowns;—a very fashionably-attired, not bad-looking, female she is—a great favourite with gentlemen, and (between you and I) not likely to be long a sorrowing widow. If you can get anything better, don't take this; but it may be better than staying here. She is not a bad woman, I believe; only, perhaps, you had better be cautious not to put your good looks too forward. Eh? Do you understand me?"

"No; I can't help my looks, good or bad. As to the pay—I should like more, but I must make this do. I shall be off Mrs. Nairn's hands at all events."

"Then you accept?"

"Yes—if she is satisfied with me."

He promised to tell her when the lady would see her, and with a harder and longer hand-squeeze than usual, the funny little man shuffled out. Janet found left in her hand a five-pound note, wrapped in a bit of soiled paper, on which was scrawled, "To fit out with."

Now that Janet was going away, Mrs. Nairn became suddenly alive to her usefulness and cleverness as a nurse. She lamented over her solitary life, left to the mercy of a servant! She even begged Janet to give it up, and live with her. Now that Ellen was away they could manage very well; and, she added in a lower tone, "and then your friend will be all the more ready and willing to assist me, knowing you to be here. He don't wish you to slave and work, he said so. But 'tis your dreadful proud temper, just as it always did try and worry me years ago. Your papa ruined you, that he did! Ah, he would have liked to see you again, I dare say, poor fellow."

"And so I hope he will. I fully intend to join him some day," said Janet, cheerfully.

"No, my dear, that you certainly never will—that is—not in life; for here is a letter I forgot to show you, but 'twas that which upset me so just now when you came in. My nerves are quite ruined, and I can't bear any sudden shock now. And of course this is a shock, though I can't say it is a loss exactly. But, Janet, when I married him he was a handsome man and well off. I had at first every comfort and luxury, and it was hard to come down so at last, and bear the disgrace of being a convict's wife; and only to think of his wearing that dreadful dress and all that! but the

worst of the punishment fell on the innocent, as it always does."

"How can you say so?" put in Janet, quickly. "Pray don't talk of all that—or—I don't wish to speak angrily now—now—that I am going away so soon. But I can't bear that to be said. Is this *his* writing?"

"No, of course not. But read, and you'll see; and, Janet, I feel exhausted. Don't be crying here just now. Go to the other room and get it over, and just give me a glass of wine, my dear; and there'll be the mourning to order, and my illness has cost so much too! Well, after all, it is as well perhaps you are going to gain something—and—Janet—perhaps you won't put on black just at first? They won't know anything you see, and you can wait till you get your quarter paid up."

But Janet had not waited to hear the end. Alarmed at her stepmother's words, and puzzled at the writing, she went to her own room to ensure a little quiet in order to read the letter, and there was a foreboding of trouble on her heart as she shut that door. When she again left the room, it was with the consciousness that another turn in her life ha come.

CHAPTER XVII.

TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF.

"Oh, yes, I think you will suit me charmingly, Miss Nairn! I suppose I am a very odd and fanciful being, but I do always know directly who I like or dislike. You must come at once; your voice is delicious in speaking, and your touch on the piano-forte just what I like. But—O dear! how I do wish you were not in such deep mourning! You can't conceive what creeps and shudders it gives me! I shook off my own weeds as fast as possible. It was hateful to me, I assure you! What can be the use of so much ugly dismal stuff! I don't object to good black silk, or velvet, of course. But that woollen material—that crape! Oh, it is dreadful! Couldn't you be so very obliging as to curtail the period of mourning? Is it for a very near friend, I wonder?"

"My father," Janet answered, in a cold low tone.

"Indeed! How shocking! And how long have you worn it?"

"Just a week."

"Dreadful! But don't you think it is a silly fashion? What good does it do to the dead that we should be miserable and ugly?"

"If my present dress is objectionable I think I had better decline your offer. I could not leave off my black dress. My—my father. I mean that I would not but pay him every customary honour for anything. I had better give it up I think?" and Janet rose from her chair, unable to prevent a slight trembling. She had been much shaken by the sudden tidings which changed all her plans for the future.

Her father had died, after a few days' illness, from an attack of fever, and a friend had fulfilled his promise of writing to tell his—Mrs. Nairn. She had received the letter during Janet's absence one day, and after a fit of hysterics, forgot to tell her the tidings.

No need now to save money for the sake of one day joining him in that far country! No bright and comforting hope of some one to love dearly and serve—the indulgent if erring father, whose darling she had been.

Life seemed dark and dreary now, and it was a very different thing to labour on as a teacher day after day, with a certain hope of a different life hereafter, from the same monotonous, ungenial work, and nothing to look forward to. Would Mr. Russell be glad or sorry that she could not go away? Was there any chance of his coming to see her at Mrs. Everly Smythe's? How would he hear of her departure from her stepmother's house?

These questions were perpetually rising in Janet's mind, and never answered. And now as she rose, swelling with anger at the lady's strange request, she almost repented of her rash wish to be a governess! If it was only the teaching, it would be nothing. But to be subject to such insults—such impertinent remarks, and to feel powerless to resent it!

"Stay, Miss Nairn. Pray don't excite yourself or upset

me by any impulsive act. Dear me, I fear you are sadly excitable or sensitive! But you must not mind me, or what I say. I always do say the bluntest things. It is my nature to be frank. But I don't want to offend you, and really I think you will suit so well in all other respects. I must try and overcome my nervous horror of black. You *will* soon get a nice soft silk, I am sure, not a rustling one—won't you?"

"I fear silk dresses will not be in my power," remarked Janet, coldly.

"O yes! And now—you can come directly, can't you? You have no idea how wild the children are growing, and poor me so incapable—such a poor creature always! You won't object to frequent change of scene and air? I can't exist without it; but I see we shall get on famously, and I shall not rest till I have you here safely."

So everything was settled, and in another week, just as spring winds ceased and summer came, Janet was installed as governess at the Chantry House, to Julia and Amy Smythe, and partly companion to their mother—that is, when she had no visitors, and felt dull and "nervous."

Janet wrote out her future address in a clear hand, and begged her stepmother on no account to forget to give it to Mr. Russell, if he ever chanced to call and asked for her.

"Why don't you write to him yourself, Janet? It is great folly in you to lose such a good friend, and one day you will be sorry."

"No, I cannot write; I don't know that he will come again; and, mother, pray don't you be writing and—and begging! Only if he does ask for me there is my direction."

In many a troubled and lonely hour did this card of ad-

dress cheer Janet, making her hope, in some undefined way, that he would surely come again to see her, and inquire about her. Finding her gone from Mrs. Nairn's house, he would naturally seek her at Mrs. Everly Smythe's. And then she was angry with herself and ashamed for expecting it—for why should he take the trouble to come and see her? She had no claim on him at all. No! She must not, and would not think about it.

Week glided into week, and Janet was getting accustomed to her new home and to her pupils, and trying with all her might not to rise against the whims and caprice of the lady—but no one ever inquired for Miss Nairn.

The postman's rap-tap caused excitement from the mistress to the scullery-maid, but not once came there a letter for the governess. What could it be—but that she was forgotten. She had wilfully thrown away friends at home, and now Miss Russell had convinced her brother of her wrong conduct, and he also gave her up. Or—was it—that he was too much occupied—too well employed and too happy, to find time to think of one who had only proved a trial and disappointment to him?

And then, after a fortnight's restlessness, Mrs. Everly Smythe settled she must have a change, and must go where good bathing could be had. So that orders were given for packing up, and all were to go to a fashionable watering-place.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANNA'S NEWS.

CHRISTMAS was over, and a steady hard frost had set in. People at Wareham said they had not known so cold a winter for years, and as it had succeeded a rather damp autumn, there were more than the usual average of deaths. Elderly and weak persons were cut off, and even the stronger ones showed a change.

Miss Russell persisted in going to the new chapel twice on a Sunday; but Betty watched her go and come with anxious eyes.

"Missis aint so upright for certain, and there's a jerk like in her steps, and she do look so cruel pinched and white, all along of the cold, enough to kill anybody, let alone a lady pretty well up in years."

"Yes," was the answer. "It is the general remark that Miss Russell is altered, and beginning to show age. She stoops, and there aint quite so much bounce in her manner. She's quieter like, and all the better for sure; for she was a terrible body when the fit took her to be angry."

"She aint well. She aint her own self a bit," returned Betty. "There's a something on her mind. My opinion is

she's never been to say the same lady since the day Miss Janet cut and run ; and as for master it has aged him uncommon ! "

" What a strange affair it was ! What could induce the girl to run away from such friends, and, as I have heard, to nothing very comfortable ? "

" La, bless me ! who knows ? Not I, I'm sure ! But in my heart I believe she was fairly skeered at the idea of marriage when it came close upon her."

" But it was such a good match."

" Aye, it were. But a maiden's fancies are like the sand on the sea shore and can't be numbered. And, maybe, she didn't care about him for all his handsome features and well-filled purse."

" Indeed ! that's strange."

" Yes, strange—and I've had my thoughts too, but never mind—all's for the best you see."

It was quite time that Miss Russell was changed. There was an anxious look always in her face, and she was so sharp and irritable that Anna was glad to take refuge in added visits about the parish, and more and more fancy work.

Mrs. Spencer and Agnes had gone from Wareham to pay some visits they said, and Mr. Russell no doubt missed them sadly. He told his friends so at the Rectory, and smiled kindly, if with a little suppressed humour, when he excused himself from accepting Mrs. Mitchell's hearty invitations for tea, and to have a game of chess or a little music.

Miss Russell gave strict orders not to admit Mrs. Mitchell, for she did not feel strong enough for her overpowering hilarity. In other respects the old life was hardly changed. The clerk at the office could have told of sundry letters

directed to Mrs. Nairn, at St. Thomas', but he was a discreet and silent man, and never did talk of what went on within the counting-house.

Besides there was much writing backwards and forwards to the branch house in Spain, and again trouble loomed in that quarter and made Mr. Russell anxious. Strange to say his sister's manner of receiving these doubts was very different from what he expected. She seemed even to brighten up at the prospect of troubles there, and while he was in perplexity and doubt, fearing to grieve her, she astonished him by proposing that he should once more go to Spain to settle the business on the spot—"for there was nothing like looking at things one self," she said.

"Well, yes, that's true, but I am not much inclined for so long a journey just now," said Jacob, dreamily. He was bending over the piano-forte, passing his fingers over the keys, and now and then striking a chord softly.

Miss Russell was employed in the old manner, in tearing paper, very upright and stern, yet with a more restless glance every now and then towards her brother, and a slight twitching of the mouth, which was a sure sign of anxiety in her. She looked older, and so did the carpet. But stringent economy was the order of the day, and Mr. Russell had been severely rebuked for suggesting that a new one was desirable. Just now it lay in the shade, and the last wintry sunbeams only rested on a glass full of choice flowers, in the centre of the round table.

Jacob's eyes wandered from the keys to the flowers, and then softly humming a few bars of an air, he rose in his slow way and drew a chair near the table. Then he touched the delicate blossoms in a tender caressing way, and

stooped to inhale their scent, as some people kiss a young child.

"Jacob, are you attending to me or not? Because it looks much as if you were studying those bits of ivory, or now those stupid flowers. Bless me! how can a sensible creature be so ridiculous with a few weeds—smelling and touching and what not! On my word I believe you grow more fantastical every day. And, by the bye, where do the flowers come from now that Miss Spencer is gone?"

"Mrs. Grant kindly sends them."

"Kindly encourages folly! Bad enough for that young girl, but a woman of Mrs. Grant's age should know better. But do you hear me? I say you had better go to Spain yourself."

At this moment the door was suddenly thrown open, and Anna rushed in in her half vehement half coquettish way.

"Have you heard the news?" she exclaimed. "Such extraordinary news! I did guess it once, and I am the least bit hurt that she did not tell me first. O, Jacob, are *you* here? Have you heard?"

"If you have anything to say, Anna, sit down and take breath and tell us quietly. Some gossip of the Mitchells, doubtless," observed Miss Russell.

"Oh! that's what you think! Well, you are wrong for once, sister, quite wrong. Now guess: guess, both of you; Jacob, do you give up?" And she came behind him and gave by no means a particularly gentle pat on his shoulder.

"What do you say?" he asked absently.

Anna tossed her curls and looked offended. "It is hardly worth while to mention anything here. Some people are so cold, so unimpressible. I can't understand such natures—

like—like—wet blankets. I only wonder that I am what I am, and every bit of spirit and enthusiasm isn't fairly driven out of me! However——"

"Ring the bell, Jacob," said Miss Russell, peremptorily, so as to cut short Anna's speech.

Anna moved towards the door, with a red face, but her brother detained her by laying his hand on her arm.

"Come, Anna, don't punish me for my inattention. Tell us your news. It will be a welcome turn, for I think we are a little dull here."

"Indeed we are," sighed Anna, soothed by her brother's manner into forgetting her anger. "Since the Spencers went, it is like—like a desert island," she added.

"Anna, be correct, pray. How can a town resemble a desert island, pray?" put in Miss Russell. "And as to the Spencers; well, I think the gallivanting went quite far enough, that I do. People can't live for idle pleasure always. Business must be attended to, and Jacob was getting frightfully idle."

"But my news, sister; come, have you no idea whatever?"

"No; ideas were never much in my way, and never will be with my consent. Useless rubbish, fit for romances, are ideas, and never did anybody any good that I could see."

Jacob smiled.

"Mr. Lewis is going to marry——who?" said Anna, playfully.

"Bridget Mitchell," suggested Jacob.

"Fiddlesticks," said Miss Russell, but her eyes glanced keenly over her spectacles at Anna's face.

"Come, Jacob, this is important to you. Oh, how blind

you are. Why, Miss Spencer. Eleanor Spencer—and a capital match too."

"The other one is prettiest," drily remarked Miss Russell.

"Why important to *me*, Anna?" asked Jacob, at the same time.

"Oh! if *you* don't feel it, of course no one else can."

"I suppose you mean that it will bring them here again? Yes, that is pleasant."

"If Mr. Lewis must do a silly thing, why he has made a tolerable choice. She has a little money, and is old enough to have no nonsense," said Miss Russell. "But if you go to Spain, their coming here won't affect you, Jacob," she added.

"Spain! Jacob!" exclaimed Anna. "What can take him there again?"

"Because change of air and scene is good for his constitution," answered Miss Russell, with an attempt at a grim smile.

"Nonsense, Jacob is not ill."

"There is important business to be done," said Miss Russell.

"Are you serious, Jacob?" asked Anna.

"Well, I suppose so. I—I don't wish to leave, but if it is my duty, of course I will do so." So saying he left the room. Taking his hat he strolled out. A young moon was rising, and though cold the air was clear, and the break of the waves on the pebbles was distinctly heard.

Mr. Russell found himself on the terrace, in front of the house in which the Spencers had lived. Strangers were there already. The scent of a cigar reached him from the verandah, and the sound of young voices came from the bay window where Janet and Agnes had so often sat and

laughed and talked; where George Spencer had often stood looking admiringly on the dark-eyed little maiden Jacob first saw in those wretched lodgings on the Quay.

Every thing seemed to come back with singular vividness this evening. All Janet's wayward tempers, all her shy but eager love when he showed her any kindness. The wonderful change he saw in her when he came back from his other journey to the Spanish House; and then, the Spencers, and George's courtship, and the abrupt, strange ending, he went over it all. He did not like leaving home. He wished to watch over her at a distance, and if he could not prevent her working and gaining some experience of life, yet he would so far protect her that in case of misfortune he would be at hand. He did not like leaving her with her stepmother.

Still, he felt that it was not advisable for him to seek her often. That last interview had shaken him a good deal, and he had resolved to keep away. He could do her no good, and his sister was right in saying that the Spanish business required overlooking. Money had become of greater importance in his eyes lately, and he indulged uncertain hopes of being able yet to help Janet in this manner, and perhaps after a little time, sheltering her from the evils of poverty as well as all need for her being a governess.

Yes, his sister was wise and right, and to Spain he ought to go. What was there, or who was there to keep him here? No one; not one in all the world would really miss him and feel something wanting in every daily act while he was absent. If he sent Penn, there was a wife and half a dozen children to feel dull and reckon up the days till he came back. No, clearly, if any one must go it must be himself, and at once too! Yes, that very brig now swaying

with the tide in the basin, was destined to sail in three days. Should he sail in her? Short notice: but what matter? His socks were always in order, and Betty would have all ready. Some arrangements must be made in the counting-house—and thither he now directly bent his steps, and found Penn preparing to shut up work. After a few words on the subject, which surprised the clerk, they went out together.

"I am sorry, sir; of course you know I am ready to go, if that will do?"

"Thank you, Penn. But your wife will say it is best that I go. The change will do me good, I dare say."

Just then a tiny creature toddling along behind her father, who sauntered on, pipe in mouth, tripped her foot and fell on the hard round pebbles, with a shrill cry.

Mr. Russell caught her up, and heedless of the bread and butter in her hand, he kissed the soiled face tenderly, murmuring consoling words.

When the father turned and received his child, Mr. Russell asked her name.

"Jenny? little Jenny," he repeated after the man. "Richard Ball's little girl?"

"The same your honour, and number nine, sir, and none o' em big enough to gain a penny. Hard matter, sir, to keep 'em and that it is!"

"Ah! think yourself well off, my good fellow, the child is hearty, and a house is always brighter for having little ones about." And Jacob sighed as he slipped a crown into little Jenny's small hand.

The man grinned and patted his child's curling head with his hard bronzed hand.

"And that's gospel truth too, your honour. But this here life is like a puzzle at a fair, and things seem shuffled permiscus-like, all topsy-turvy. The poor man has got the long family and the rich man's quiver is often empty—eh, sir?"

CHAPTER XIX.

GOOD-BYE!

THERE was a good deal of running up and down stairs, of washing, starching and ironing, and turning out wardrobes, in No. 1, Queen's Terrace. Betty's cheeks were a shade less red, and she did sometimes complain that her legs ached when they were going to bed.

Anna was occupied in writing sheets and sheets to her particular friend on the subject of her approaching marriage; but she annoyed her sister sometimes by lamenting over the necessity for Jacob's journey, and prophesying all kinds of accidents. "It was tempting Providence to go again after being so near shipwreck," she said.

"It is much more tempting of Providence to be idling here, a prey to every clever designing woman bent on matrimony," returned Miss Russell one day, quickly.

"O, indeed! That's it then. You are really afraid of Bridget, then, sister?"

"I—afraid—of—Bridget! (with a pause between each word). Not if I know it, Anna. If you said afraid of Jacob 'twould be more sense. He is better away for a time, mark my words. There's danger about—I know it—I feel

it. Anna!" she added solemnly, "you and I ought to repent that deed in dust and ashes. I don't see the end of it, I confess. I am anxious, and Spain is a good way off, you see."

"What do you mean, sister? You surely don't mean—— you are not thinking of——"

"There, there! Stop. Yes; I am thinking of——" and she nodded her head two or three times, gravely.

"But she is gone—she will never come back, and——"

"What has been once may happen again. And there's the post."

"O, Jacob, you did startle me!" exclaimed Anna, as he entered in a quicker way than usual.

"The *Princess* sails with the morning ebb, sister," he said. "And I——"

"You go in her," she interrupted.

"Yes—if you approve, that is."

Miss Russell left her seat and went to the door. Then she turned and said, "I am going to see that all is ready," and left the room.

"Anna, take care of her!"

"What, of our sister? You need hardly tell me that, I should think. Eleanor is surprised at your going, and Agnes says she is glad she is not coming here, or she would never forgive you. Won't this have an odd appearance to them, Jacob?"

"How?"

"Well. It is odd, after all the attention you have paid, and every one talking of it, and expecting to hear it is an engagement."

"What engagement?"

"Nonsense—you know. Why between you and Agnes Spenser."

"Anna! I did give you credit for more sense—more knowledge of things. But pray never say such a thing again."

"Every one says it."

"Then every one is wrong, and I am sorry."

"Well, well! I think you are very foolish. I believe you might have her if you liked."

"Not at all. And besides this, you may believe me when I say that I do not like, and never shall like."

"Then why did you seek her so much?"

"As a bachelor such as I am—as a man of my years and appearance, may seek a sweet girl who is kind enough to talk to him—nothing more. Besides, it was owing to her seeking some one else, that brought her here. Anna! I dare not mention it to my sister, but can't—won't you be kind to *her* —try and find out where she is, and what doing—and, if needful, help her. Pray do this, Anna!"

"Who do you mean?"

"Janet."

"I!—I! You wouldn't have me stoop to seek her out after what has happened? No, Jacob; anything else you request, but not that. If you don't consider my self-respect, I must do so."

She left the room before he found an answer, but he looked grieved. Then he went to a drawer and took out some letter paper, found a pen which he had to mend, and then after some long pauses he began to write rapidly. Presently he walked up and down the room as if in deep thought, stopped and tore up the written sheet, and then began

another, which he wrote more leisurely, often pausing to consider.

At last he had finished, and he folded and directed it carefully, lingering over it as if unwilling to stop. His sister came in just as he had quite done, and they had a grave talk together chiefly on business matters.

It was interrupted at last by the street-door bell, and Betty coming in to say the "Captain thought master's baggage should go aboard at once, and with his respects, they must go out very soon with the fair wind." This hurried the leave-taking by an hour or so. But all was ready.

"We'll have family prayers first, Jacob," said Miss Russell.

"Yes—we will. I am glad you mentioned it, sister."

"Why—is it such a wonder? Don't we have prayers every night?" she returned, fretfully.

But though it was an every-day proceeding, somehow Jacob's voice failed a little, and he had to blow his nose often. Miss Russell, kneeling at his side, took the book and proceeded at first in a firm, clear voice. But when she came to the prayer for all conditions of men, Jacob was startled by a sudden sob. She recovered, however, and said, "Short good-byes are best—good night!" She trembled in spite of her efforts to be calm. He kissed her several times, and putting his letter on the chimney-piece, he said, "Will you have this posted for me?" Then there was Anna full of lament and cautions, and Betty's silent, expressive look. A sailor had shouldered the portmanteau, and Mr. Russell followed him, his heavy steps sounding sharp on the frosty footpath.

In another hour the *Princess* was moving out with a fair wind and tide, and the sailors' song reached Queen's Terrace.

Miss Russell drew a long sigh, almost it seemed of relief.

"Well, he is safe I hope now."

"How can you say that when he may be wrecked, or a hundred frightful things?" asked Anna.

"Better that than disgrace. Yes; I think he is safe now. I hope he will have forgotten all about it before he comes back. A deep-laid plot and an artful girl, but I'll beat her now—yes, in spite of those black eyes of hers, I will!"

CHAPTER XX.

TEMPTATION.

The morning after Mr. Russell sailed, Betty observed to her fellow-servant that she had heard footsteps in the night, and she believed it was "missis."

But if Miss Russell had been wakeful and restless, she did not allow it to any one. She appeared about twenty minutes later than usual for breakfast, upright and stern as ever, and in every word and look she implied a reproach to Betty for her swelled face and red eyes.

As she retreated to her usual chair and corner for her morning's reading, her glance fell on the letter which Jacob had placed on the chimney-piece—Jacob's letter to Janet, telling her of his leaving home, full of kind advice and friendly hopes that she would not hesitate to apply to his confidential man, Mr. Penn, if she was in any difficulty. Also begging her to forgive him for placing a sum of money in Penn's hands for her use, independently of her step-mother, who, he hoped, was tolerably well provided for.

An angry look gathered on Miss Russell's brow, and her mouth twitched nervously. After a moment's hesitation she took up the letter, examining it minutely—seal, direction, and

all. Then she seemed to study the carpet intently, and glanced sharply round the room, and at the window. Again she examined the direction, and her mouth was set more firmly; a grim look of satisfaction succeeded the previous expression of anxiety, and, after another pause, she hastily put the letter into her pocket.

How easy it is to be righteously indignant at the weakness or the fault of another! Women carefully trained, gifted with calm and affectionate hearts, content to love moderately, hedged in by household laws and the proprieties of social life, sheltered lovingly from the awful blast of passion, perhaps only knowing it as an unseemly word—what do such know of the temptations of those others who are left to ignorance, unkindness, and thè pangs of a craving, starved heart—to ruin and despair?

We pass on, thanking God that we are not as they are; we leave them, perhaps, to their struggles: they may attain a hard-won victory, or they may stumble till they are prone to give up the fight. Who knows that a kind word might not help them? Little mercy has man for a fellow-sinner. He who sins through the affections, craving love and writhing under jealousy, has little sympathy or pity for those whose temptation lies in a cold, indifferent nature; while the prudent and the gentle soul is apt to ask with horror, "And may not love be tranquil?"

We will not attempt to follow the windings of Miss Russell's thoughts. There was no doubt a hard struggle with her knowledge of right and wrong, and her nature. She was deemed a pious woman, of high principle; and she had fought against and trodden on her nature all her life.

It is an awful thought that one step either to the wrong or

to the right way, should bring a host of consequences on our own and other's heads. A whole tragedy may be traced to one single action.

Had Miss Russell's life stealthily and silently led her on to this moment, when the battle must be fought with evil—when every indulged temper stood up in array on the wrong side, and with a sudden onset as it were, beat down the attempted resistance? Had she been asked, would she have allowed that she could be so tempted? But she was alone, and no one knew what passed in her own mind.

An hour after, when Anna came in dressed for a walk, Miss Russell was knitting; she looked up for a moment to desire Anna to give some message at the baker's.

"Is there a letter to post?" asked Anna.

"No."

Meeting Mrs. Mitchell in her walk, Anna told her "it was wonderful to see sister's courage and strength of mind. No one would guess that she had passed through such a trial."

"But is it a trial?" asked Mrs. Mitchell.

"To be sure it is. She can't bear Jacob to be away. I know it has troubled her greatly—the very notion of it. But——"

"She thinks he is better out of the way for a little, eh, Anna?" observed Mrs. Mitchell, with a laugh and a jerk of her skirt. "Don't look offended, for of course we can see plainly enough what your sister is afraid of, and to say truly, she is right too, Anna—while that girl is so near, there is no telling what may happen. Men are queer creatures, every one of them, and she is a girl that knows the weak side of any man, or my name's not Mitchell! I can tell you we were rather alarmed for Edward. Men will admire fine eyes, and

so on, and he always stuck up for the dark eyes above pretty Agnes Spencer. You know, don't you, that—she—that the not-to-be-named young lady is living a governess with the beautiful widow as they call her, Mrs. Everly Smythe—quite a fashionable woman, I can tell you! Whether she will allow—*her*—to appear in society, I don't know. I should fancy she would be jealous of a rival; but if she does it will be a grand thing, and perhaps *she* will catch some other silly moth. Have you heard of Mr. Spencer lately?" and Mrs. Mitchell paused from lack of breath.

"He is travelling in Italy, and writes very miserably his sister says. Can't forget her at all! It is a wonderful case of delusion, or—or——"

"Witchery! that's it, Anna. Those are the real witches depend upon it! Such speaking eyes; such long silken hair; such changing colour; and then she had such sweet little hands and feet too! She ought to be burnt or drowned —ought she not now?"

CHAPTER XXI.

COME AGAIN.

"If you please, Miss Nairn, mamma wishes you would come in this evening," said Julia Smythe one afternoon, when flushed and tired after her day's teaching, Janet was refreshing herself with a little quiet music. This was however a rare indulgence for her to take, for her proficiency in music had become somewhat troublesome in its consequences. Was Mrs. Everly Smythe dull or tired, Janet was called on to sing or to play. Were there any guests, rather "heavy on hand," and not quite worthy of the fascinating widow's own exertions, "Miss Nairn's delightful singing" was brought into use.

But Janet particularly disliked being present when there was company. She did try to overcome this feeling of pride; often she had a hard battle with herself, and then went down with eyes rather red and with her most cold and hard manner. At such times if she was not noticed, the song or the air she played, unconsciously soothed her, and the subdued buzz of conversation, the tasteful elegance of the room, sensitive as she was to all such impressions, gave her a sense of pleasure. In the pauses, when she was not at the piano-

forte, Janet even got amused with watching the people, particularly at the eager admiration Mrs. Everly Smythe roused.

She was certainly very elegant and could be very winning; —and Janet caught herself wondering what Mr. Russell would think of her; she was just the kind of person that George Spencer would admire, she fancied. It must be very pleasant to be so generally attractive. What was the secret of it, for after all Mrs. Everly Smythe had no great share of beauty? Then Janet's thoughts wandered back to the one or two occasions when she had been in society, not as a paid governess. Her experience whispered that she also might have been admired, she might have been the centre of attraction to every one in the room, perhaps! But she had thrown from her every chance. There was nothing now for her but to plod on, to try and step a little higher, so as to gain a larger salary, and surely if her music was so useful to Mrs. Everly Smythe, it might be turned to account for her own profit.

When Janet entered the room, she found just one of the usual gatherings which Mrs. Everly Smythe liked, composed mostly of gentlemen, with just a sufficient sprinkling of ladies, none of these however in any way particularly attractive. As usual the chair on which the fair widow reclined was surrounded by people eager for her notice.

Mrs. Everly Smythe just noticed Janet's entrance by a friendly nod and smile, and on seeing her pass the pianoforte for a seat, she said lightly, "Come, Miss Nairn, I am impatiently waiting for my favourite song."

Janet gravely placed herself at the instrument, and striking a few well-chosen chords, she soon burst into

a wild, exciting song. Very soon the chattering subsided, evidently the song and the voice met with approval.

When it was over there was a little murmuring interchange of question and answer. Janet's head went up higher and her lips were more tightly pressed together, as she only too easily guessed what their whispers were. She did not move from her place, but sat still, like a person resolved to do her duty.

Presently a pleasant voice sounded close behind her. "Thanks, for a real treat! And curiously your song carried me into another scene. I never heard the air except once, and that was in a gale of wind at sea."

"Indeed!" and Janet looked interested.

"It was on board a yacht. We were a merry party enough —and suddenly one evening there arose a regular gale, and we were in positive danger for a little time. My friend, the owner of the yacht, had been in the blues all the voyage, but some persons get roused and excited in any danger. His old and usual spirits seemed to return all at once, and he whistled this very air. He is a first-rate whistler—in fact I should say a first-rate fellow altogether. I think he said the air was manuscript, or some such thing."

"It is not published, but it is old I believe," Janet said.

"And have you the notes?"

"No, I learnt it by ear. I heard it first played on the violin, and then—then—we got some words that seemed suitable."

"But that is rather curious, isn't it?" the gentleman began, but he was interrupted by a message from Mrs. Everly Smythe begging for some more music.

The gentleman, Mr. Moore by name, was challenged to

a game of chess by a lady, and Janet did not come near him again. No one else spoke to her except in a way which she secretly resented, though she vainly tried to grow accustomed to it.

But many questions were put to Mrs. Everly Smythe as to where she picked up such a "charming governess," and so forth.

"Well, yes," the widow said, carlessly. "She is an acquisition. Her voice is lovely, and her touch a rare one. And as you say, she is good-looking—in a certain style. I dare say you think it strange in me not to bring her more forward —introduce her, and so on. But I consider it a matter of principle not to do so. It is only cruel to a young person to put ideas into her head, to rouse a taste which can't be gratified. When I happen to be alone, she often spends the evening with me of course. Her fault is her cold temper—indeed I suspect she has not a good temper, and I am careful not to provoke her."

Mrs. Everly Smythe's friends thought her very sensible and judicious, and directly began also to read "temper" in the constrained and grave manner of the governess. Some few would have pleased Miss Russell in agreeing with her that Janet's style of singing was not lady-like; far too "theatrical;" but on the whole, it was decided that the little dark-eyed governess was a gain to the party; this was specially the opinion of a few gentlemen, and one or two had sought to get better acquainted by accosting her in the street, or when she was with her pupils on the Promenade. But Janet's bow stopped these attempts at once, and she was pronounced to be a "proud little minx," &c.

Pride made her reject all such advances; if they would

not notice her in Mrs. Smythe's drawing room, as one of the company, neither should they presume on any acquaintance elsewhere. But all the time Janet felt very desolate. Many a warning that Agnes Spencer had uttered was now realised, and she was feeling to the very core, what the life of a governess often—not always perhaps, but often is.

Janet happened, the morning after the party, to cross the hall as Mr. Moore left the drawing room, and she heard him say in his loud, cheery voice,

"Oh, yes, I'll bring him. True, he is not what he used to be; but I am sure you will like him, and he is crazy about music."

"Some more visitors this evening, I suppose," Janet thought to herself, and she felt rather glad that Mr. Moore was coming again. She liked his look and his voice, and he had spoken to her naturally, as he would to any other lady.

For the first time Janet took a little pains with her dress. Usually, she felt rather proud of quickly slipping on her one black dress, no matter how. It was contrary to her nature to be otherwise than neat, but she resolved not to spend a penny more than actually needful on her dress as a governess. At first, Mrs. Everly Smythe had expressed a wish for her to dress well, but of late she had said nothing more: perhaps she was as well satisfied that it was Janet's pleasure to dress plainly. Though it was pleasant to have an attraction, even in the shape of a governess,—some one for her guests to talk of, still Mrs. Everly Smythe, in her heart, was relieved at Janet's persistence in keeping aloof and silent.

On this evening, Janet braided her abundant hair in the old way, as she had done when the Spencers knew her: it took a little longer, and she was rather late. The room was

nearly full, and coffee was being handed, amid a great deal of animated conversation. Yet many an eye was turned to glance at the young girl, who came in so quietly, but with such a graceful carriage. The plain black silk became her well, and showed off the delicate transparency of her complexion. Notwithstanding the erect head, her eyes drooped, and her cheeks were slightly flushed, as the buzz ceased for an instant, and she felt she was observed. She went straight towards the piano-forte, not expecting any one to greet her. But a gentleman was sitting on the music-stool, and turning the leaves of a book of songs, while talking to a lady. Then Janet felt some one gently guide her to a chair, and a voice she knew to be Mr. Moore's said—

"Your rightful throne is usurped for the present. Miss Clayton is going to sing with my friend."

Janet bowed, and took the offered chair.

Mr. Moore immediately drew another just in front of her, so that she could not see those who were at the piano-forte.

"I beg your pardon, I didn't hear what you said—I—" and Janet's face was suddenly crimson. She tried to answer Mr. Moore's questions, how long she had been here, and if she liked it? and so on; but she felt confused, and like one dreaming, for, with Mr. Moore's voice, and above the soft murmur from the other people, a voice strangely familiar struck to her heart.

Just then, however, Miss Clayton began her song, and other sounds were hushed.

"Oh, I see the duet doesn't come off this time," remarked Mr. Moore. "My friend is shy; but, though not by any means a professed singer, he has capital voice and a good ear. I had hard work, after all, to fulfil my promise to Mrs.

Everly Smythe; for, though he used to be the most sociable fellow alive, he has taken a fit of shunning the world lately. I tell him it is very suspicious. Spencer has always been very hard-hearted, though all the mammas are very fond of him. But his time will come, if it has not already done so."

A whizzing noise sounded in Janet's ears — the room seemed to be going round.

Mr. Moore presently became aware that there was something amiss.

"Let me get you a cup of coffee!"

And Janet was glad to accept the offer. With a desperate struggle, she conquered herself, and, by the time the song was finished, she was again calm and composed. After all, why need she feel so alarmed? He must surely have got over any pain or regret on her account. As a governess, he would only be too glad to allow her to pass unnoticed. Yet all this reasoning did not prevent her from trembling and dreading exceedingly the moment when she should be ordered to play or sing. Mr. Moore was a right friendly shelter just at present, but that could not last long.

There was a consultation about some music, a little joking, and Janet thought one laugh, singularly familiar. Then Mrs. Everly Smythe glided across the room, to inquire what the delay was about.

"Could not Miss Nairn find the song? Where was Miss Nairn?"

This last question was spoken in a slightly imperious tone, which Janet understood. She bit her lips, as she rose from her chair to present herself.

"Must you go? What lovely geraniums! One would

just set off your dress, Miss Nairn;" and Mr. Moore took just one sprig of the vivid scarlet blossom, and with a playful but very kind look, offered it to Janet.

Anything friendly was very acceptable just then; she felt so forlorn, so unprotected, and astray in the world; and he might be so vexed at her coming across his path so unopportunely. How she moved forwards, away from Mr. Moore, to the music-stool, how she sought and found the right piece and placed it on the desk, Janet could never make out. There was a confused talking and moving, that song rejected, and others sought out; and, finally, Mrs. Everly Smythe's voice roused her from all this dreamy confusion.

"Pray oblige us, Miss Nairn; give us that wild thing, or one of your choice bits of Mozart, while they are settling their duet."

And Janet was at the piano-forte, and playing on, mechanically, some slow, stately introduction. By the time she reached the faster and more difficult music, she had so far recovered her firmness that she played well. At the final, loud winding up, she was aware that some one stood close to her, though a little behind. It was a brilliant bit of music, and well played: a faint clapping showed the approval of the guests.

"You have not lost your cunning at the piano-forte, I see," said George Spencer, just in the quiet tone of a friend one sees daily.

His composure annoyed her. She put it down to indifference, or to a wish of patronising her.

"It is now a part of my daily duty," she answered, as quietly and coldly as she could.

"So I find."

"May I ask for that song you gave us last night?" asked Mr. Moore.

Without a word, Janet played the first chords. She was angry that her voice trembled slightly. If she broke down, he would think she was upset by him: so she persevered, and cleared her throat; but it was not her best singing. In the chorus, another voice joined in.

"I was remarking, last night, when Miss Nairn sang this, that I had heard it whistled," said Mr. Moore. "And so you and Miss Nairn are already acquainted? Lucky man! who is there you don't know, that is worth the knowing?"

Janet felt almost thankful to Mrs. Everly Smythe just then, for begging her to be so kind as to fetch something for her. When out of the room, she longed for the power to send an excuse and retire to her own room. But she knew that this would offend her mistress. She had rather sacrifice her children's lessons than lose anything which added to the pleasantness of her "at homes."

"I am a servant indeed," Janet thought, with bitterness. Then came the correcting remembrance. "But it is my own choice. I have no one to blame."

Rapidly did the thoughts course through her. She might at this moment have been herself the head of a house, with the power and means to arrange pleasant parties, as Mrs. Everly Smythe did. Then the figure of George Spencer came before her, as he appeared that evening among the rest, coming on her suddenly, as a stranger. Yes, he was not a man to be otherwise than proud of his acquaintance; good-looking, and well mannered, with a certain ease about him only attained by mixing much in society. And what were his feelings towards herself? If they were to meet some-

times in this manner, how was it to be? He did not mean to cut her—that was certain. But how far would he claim acquaintance? Would he ever allude to former passages, or would he let it be, as a thing past and forgotten, a leaf turned over? What was it Mr. Moore had said as to his being altered? Had the past really affected his buoyant spirits? Common-place and quiet as his words had been, Janet felt that there was kind feeling expressed in the tone of voice.

But she must not linger; she must return to the room, and into his presence.

The drawing-room was empty, for the visitors had thronged to the verandah and lawn to see some fireworks, about which a difference of opinion had arisen—some declaring the light to be a meteor, others a rocket. Mrs. Everly Smythe could not be found at once, and Janet determined to seize this little respite and remain in the empty room till she returned.

"Won't you come and see?" asked Mr. Spencer, stepping over the mat, and offering his arm to her, as if they had met every day.

"What is there to see?" she asked.

"Well, the moonlight is first-rate, and the fishing-boats out there are as if standing for their pictures. How long have you known Mrs. Smythe? Do you like her?"

"As well as I care to, I suppose."

He laughed a little.

"That is so exactly one of your speeches. I must report it to Agnes. By the way, you don't ask for her—eh?"

"How is she?" said Janet, in a low voice.

"Charmingly well, though very vexed at being away from her dear Wareham. It is surprising what she sees so super

excellent in that little spot. But Aggie was always the most constant of damsels." Then, after a pause, in which Janet could not utter a word, "By the way, how she will query and catechize me, when she hears of this meeting. Haven't you any message for her?"

"No; I think not."

"What, not a scrap of love or regards, after all your friendship and swearing never to forget?"

"I shall never forget; there's no fear of that: but—but, no; it's not my place to send a message."

"And why not?"

"Because circumstances are altered. Our two paths no longer run together. I can never, never forget Ag—, your sister; but on every account it is best not to try and break through the partition wall which now rises between herself and me."

"Partition wall! Really your language is frightfully learned and obscure, Miss Nairn. What in the name of common sense do you mean?"

"My meaning is obvious enough, Mr. Spencer. Seeing me as you do to-night, as the hired—the paid servant of Mrs. Smythe, unable even to refuse to sing and play when I longed to do so—seeing all this, as you do—seeing that I alone in all this company am neglected, not spoken to—you can easily understand what I mean by something dividing me from your sister."

By this time they were near others. Janet's voice had a ring in it which evidently touched her companion. He pressed her arm a little, and then half whispered,

"It is not Agnes who will raise any wall. And after this lucky stroke of mine I can't believe in anything of the sort."

Janet withdrew her hand from his arm rather quickly as Mr. Moore drew near, to beg her to take a part in some catches, to be sung in the garden.

In spite of herself, she could not help feeling less hard, for George's manner and words had been so very pleasant—so exactly what they should be. Certainly it was something to have such good tact and temper. And this unexpected meeting might not, after all, lead to anything unpleasant. Even the contrary.

CHAPTER XXII.

WANTED AT HOME.

"So, Miss Nairn, you knew this charming Mr. Spencer before. Do you know anything about his family also—and is he all that Mr. Moore says?"

Thus spoke Mrs. Everly Smythe at breakfast, and Janet answered with a throb of gratified pride,

"His mother and sisters are pleasant and ladylike people. I believe that he has very comfortable, if not ample means."

"And pray—if I may ask such a question, where did you meet them?"

"Where I then lived; at Wareham."

"Oh; and I hear Wareham is a delightful place! I have a great mind to go there. Is the air bracing, Miss Nairn? and is there any decent society there?"

Mr. Spencer had made an impression on Mrs. Everly Smythe, and a very brisk intercourse was established. He was a constant visitor in the privileged "morning room," and a very frequent companion in her rides and drives, Janet knew. But with this she had nothing to do, and the school-room business went on as regularly as if no Mr. Spencer had appeared.

It so happened that for several evenings Mrs. Smythe had engagements out, and consequently Janet was left to the quiet schoolroom. She assured herself over and over again, that Mr. Spencer had really passed over that one phase of his life, and that he had accepted her decision as final. He meant to be kind and gentlemanly; indeed, he could hardly be otherwise, but that was all. Well, this was a comfort, of course; and she need not trouble herself about his coming and going any more than with that of Mrs. Smythe's other friends. One thing made her far more uneasy, and that was the utter silence of Mr. Russell. Was it possible that all this time he had not had any communication with Mrs. Nairn? And if he had, there was her address, and why had he never tried to see her, or written to her?

There could be but one answer to this. His sister's wishes had prevailed. Mr. Russell, always so easily led by his sister, had at last given way, and sacrificed his own opinion and wishes. Or—perhaps, there was another reason, but this Janet preferred leaving in doubt. It was enough that she was left unsought. Likely enough her stepmother had disgusted him, and Janet shuddered at the bare thought of what Mrs. Nairn might have said, or asked.

Under present circumstances it was best as it was. She was independent, a thing to be thankful for; it placed the evils of her position in a more favourable light, for it was something to be away from her stepmother's home. No; she would not grumble at the hardships and the mortifications which belonged to her position as a governess. In time she should grow hardened or accustomed to it all. Life was not very tempting or promising. She must work on alone; in the world and yet not of it—as one for whom the words

"love" and "home" could never have any personal meaning; not even a holiday would be wanted, for what was there in her stepmother's house to make her wish to be there?

Now and then an illegible scrawl came to tell her that Ellen was causing much uneasiness to her mother, and that her mistress threatened to turn her away, while Mrs. Nairn's health continued to be very bad, and these notes always ended with a hint that money would be acceptable. In the last Mrs. Nairn had wondered what had become of "old Russell?"

Janet was not left long to indulge in the doubts and conjectures which suggested themselves, for Mrs. Everly Smythe was bent on giving a grand musical soirée, and Janet was called on for help of different kinds. The schoolroom business was interrupted that she might attend the "consultations" as to the programme. Some musical friends of Mrs. Smythe were enthusiastic on the subject, and very pleased to display their gifts at her expense. Janet smiled at hearing Mr. Spencer quoted as an authority: he was a great favourite with every one, and deservedly so.

For a little time there was a slight appearance of annoyance in Mrs. Everly Smythe, at the terms on which her governess and this last acquisition to her list, as she wished Mr. Spencer to be, evidently were. One day, as they were going into the room for luncheon, the servant brought a bouquet to the table.

"With Mr. Spencer's compliments, miss."

Janet flushed up, but took the flowers, observing as quietly as she could, "We were speaking of flowers last night, and he said he would get me some Gardenias."

"Are you sure it was for Miss Nairn?" inquired the widow, in a sharp and displeased manner and tone.

"Certain, ma'am. The gentleman asked if miss was at home, and as I said she was out for a walk, he left the flowers to be given as soon as she came in."

"And any message?"

"No, ma'am, not any—though I did add compliments, as a matter of course. He said Miss Nairn would know about it."

"O indeed! I was not aware—I didn't suppose it had been a pre-arranged affair," and Mrs. Smythe looked angrily at Janet.

"They will look well in your glass, if you will allow me to arrange them," Janet said, carelessly, and putting the bouquet down with indifference.

"Certainly not. I would not deprive you of such a valuable offering. However, allow me to give you just a caution how you allow this kind of thing; it may mean nothing, but it may also mean a good deal—and, after all, I know but little of Mr. Spencer. Young men of fashion and fortune think themselves privileged to take liberties sometimes, particularly with——" but here she stopped, only Janet looked up and repeated the words, "particularly with — who?" Then Mrs. Smythe finished her sentence with a smile and little shake of the head. "Well, Miss Nairn, I certainly was going to say, particularly with a pretty and unprotected girl—for, to a certain extent, a governess is unprotected. You have had little experience, and a caution may not be amiss."

Janet said, "Thank you," and then attended to her pupils' dinner. The subject was dropped, and the flowers were left

to die unheeded; for Janet would not take them for herself, nor would she again offer them for Mrs. Smythe's use.

"Didn't you receive a bouquet this morning? I called, but was again unlucky in finding you out, so I left it in the servant's charge," said Mr. Spencer, as soon as he could get by Janet that evening.

"He gave it to me, and I thank you for it, Mr. Spencer."

"I hurried off, for he wanted to show me into his mistress."

"Do you so much dislike seeing her, then?"

"By no means—that is now and then. But to tell you the truth I am afraid of her."

"In what way?" asked Janet.

"Oh, I know so well the kind of person; I have met scores of that type. She is dangerous, for she expects every man to enlist wholly in her service—a duty I would be excused if possible. And I have a bone to pick with you, as they say: why do you so pertinaciously avoid me? Now, don't deny it, for indeed it is quite plain. If I spy you and those girls on the walk, and try to overtake or meet you, I find you suddenly going home, or disappear on some shopping expedition. If I call, you are never to be seen, and——"

"Of course not. Do you suppose I spend my day in the drawing-room, ready for callers?"

"Well, no; I forgot that odious schoolroom. But then, here of an evening, and—do you never go to any party elsewhere?"

"Never."

A slight interruption prevented Mr. Spencer from answer-

ing this. After a few moments, he said, bending down, and speaking in a lower key—

"By the way, I have heard from Aggie. All sorts of messages for you. You shall read them for yourself."

Here he held a letter folded down, so that she could read these words :—"Fancy your meeting Janet! I long to see her; and pray, beg her to write to me. Tell me all about" —But Janet could not see beyond this. He replaced the letter in his pocket, with a smile. "Would you like to read it all, I wonder? Ah! you won't confess to any feminine curiosity, I see. But you will, I hope, write to her; there can be no harm in that." Seeing Janet shake her head, he added, "Why should you punish her on my account?"

"She is very kind and very good. I do love her dearly —better almost than any one—but it won't do: it is no use to begin it. No, I can't write."

But this conversation was stopped, for Janet was wanted to play the accompaniment to a song. Then she was asked to sing herself. At last, when another lady was at the piano-forte, Mr. Spencer made his way to where she had retired, somewhat in a corner.

"I remember Mr. Russell singing that with you, I think? By the way, do you know anything about him, or where he is just now?"

"No, I do not hear anything of Wareham now," she answered gravely.

"Of course you have heard that my sister Eleanor is going to be Mrs. Lewis? No? Well, it is a fact, I assure you. How do you think I shall get on with my new brother? Not well, I fear, but Aggie must do better. I

don't know what to make of it, but I certainly expected ere this to call Jacob brother, and glad should I be! He is a trump. I wish his worthy parents had thought of some other name than Jacob, and perhaps he might be, or look, a trifle younger. But one can't be everything, and I believe a better soul doesn't exist. He can be so rich and so amusing too. I know of old that you think highly of him, but I am surprised that you don't see or hear from him often! Dear me, he was so wrapped up in you! How have you managed to banish him?"

"Surely there is reason enough for all of them to be glad to leave me to myself. They are not at all related to me, you know. I have not the slightest claim on them."

Janet spoke sadly, and looked so grave and so mournful, that he did not speak, but drew a long sigh.

Presently he said, with a laugh, "Do you know that once I was very jealous of Mr. Russell? Why, surely I don't offend you by alluding—by speaking of——"

"Not 'offend,' but everything is different, and it is best to ignore the past, if we must be thrown together in this way," she said, in a nervous manner.

"Mr. Spencer! where have you retreated? Has Miss Nairn put you into the corner for an imperfect lesson? We want you to give your opinion as to these glees or duets."

"Confound the woman! she hasn't a scrap of delicacy," was his inward remark, as he moved towards the centre table, round which had gathered a consulting party.

Then he turned again. "Won't Miss Nairn also help to choose?" but no notice was taken of this, and Janet bent low over a book of prints. Very soon she went out of the room, glad of the excuse that her youngest pupil complained

of headache. When summoned to appear again, she sent word she could not leave the child.

The next day a summons came from Dr. Green, saying that Mrs. Nairn was dying, and if Janet could contrive to come back, her stepmother much wished to see her. But he prudently added, it would be a pity to run the risk of losing her situation, as she could do no real good. But Janet did not hesitate a moment. She asked to see Mrs. Smythe at once, and stated the case.

"You can't go, Miss Nairn! I really can't part with you just now, for there's the musical party, you see, and——"

"I could not attend that if here, under the circumstances. Indeed I have no choice; I feel that it is my duty to obey my stepmother's summons. I will leave lessons prepared for your children, and will promise to return the very first day I can, if you will allow me."

Mrs. Everly Smythe saw that Janet's mind was made up, and not at all wishing to lose her services, she made it a favour, and graciously gave her consent.

Janet's pupils were very sorry to part with her, and gratified her by their childish sympathy and affection. While she was packing, in order to leave by the afternoon coach, Julia came up from the luncheon. "Oh, Miss Nairn, that gentleman is very sorry you are going; and he looked so too. And he's gone away now, though mamma wished him to ride with her. He said he had a letter to finish; but mamma was not pleased, I saw, and said he was rude, and she 'wouldn't have it.' I don't know what she meant; do you?"

Janet was accustomed to the widow's caprices, and so not much disturbed at the chilling and haughty "good-bye"

Mrs. Smythe gave her. The servant got a porter to carry her small trunk, and she set off alone to find the coach at the inn from where it started.

She had just settled herself in the crowded and uncomfortable vehicle, when a hand was put in at the window, and then a letter placed in her hand. "I promised you should see Aggie's letter, and here it is. You won't be long away, will you?" and George Spencer gave her a friendly pressure, lifting his hat with the other hand. Janet thought what a pleasant, comely face he had, and how kind and forgiving of him to seek her out in this way!

The horn sounded, the horses' feet rattled, and off they were over the paved streets, while Janet was glad to look out of window and hide her tears, for this little act of care and kindness touched her heart. It gave her something to think of during the journey, too, besides that ever-recurring thought of where was Mr. Russell?

It seemed so long since she left Wareham! Life stood before her in different colours now. After all, she was very unwise and foolish; very mistaken even in her own feelings. Was it that George Spencer had improved since she last saw him, or was it in herself that the change came? Certainly she liked him much better now. The over-much gaiety which used to annoy her, as being so boyish, had changed into a more staid and sober manner. He was as agreeable as ever, and had as much to say, but he was less confident, and towards herself what could be more truly and thoughtfully delicate than his manner?

She looked at the letter. He had enclosed his sister's in another cover, and the direction to herself was in his own handwriting. It felt rather thick—but all the better. It

would be a real treat to read Agnes' letter. She would keep it for some quiet and uninterrupted time, when perhaps she should be glad of such a recreation. And then she went over every word Mr. Spencer had said about Mr. Russell and Agnes. Was it true? Would it still come to pass? and if so, why so long delayed?

CHAPTER XXIII.

WILL YOU MARRY ME?

Mr. Green had not spoken too strongly; Mrs. Nairn was indeed dying, and Janet was shocked at her appearance. Only a poor woman, who had often come to help in the cleaning when it was more than the one girl could do, was with her. On asking for Ellen, and expressing surprise that she was not with her mother, Mrs. Nairn said feebly, "She is gone! a bad, undutiful girl, who has caused her mother's death. She ran off with young Fletcher, whose father keeps a grocery shop in this street. I have often scolded her for going so much to the house, but she was so wilful! And then, it angered uncle Green, and he spoke so roughly, it brought on a pain in my heart. Oh, Janet, I am dying, deserted by all—and with no comfort or anything I ought to have." Then after taking a stimulant the nurse offered her, she whispered to Janet that "there was some money in a certain box under the bed. That she must be very careful of it, for so many came with bills, &c."

To please her Janet searched for this money, but it could not be found. She tried however to keep the loss (she strongly suspected it had been taken by the girl) from her

stepmother's knowledge, to allow her few remaining hours to be unruffled by worldly troubles.

It was a trying time; there was sharp suffering both of mind and body. Too late the poor misguided woman saw the error of her ways, and her wails were terrible to hear. Then, when these lessened and the bodily pain gave way to exhaustion, Janet was constantly disturbed by calls from the butcher, baker, &c. all clamouring to be paid.

In her loneliness and perplexity how Janet remembered the kindly tone of George Spencer's voice!

Mrs. Nairn had told her that money had been paid to her by Mr. Penn, in Mr. Russell's name, but that she had not seen or heard of him for a long time. The last time he came was on the day she had heard of Ellen's running away, and when of course she felt dreadfully upset, so much so that she utterly forgot to give Janet's card of address. She said he had been kind, but very silent and awfully grave. She supposed he was angry and resented Janet's conduct, for the next money was sent by Mr. Penn, and that was the last, she assured Janet, she had heard of any of them.

During the watches of that night, Mrs. Nairn drew out a parcel from under her pillow, and bidding Janet open it, she said, "There, you may have it now, if you like!"

It was a miniature of Mr. Nairn, taken when first he married secondly, in his prime. It was the face of a very handsome man, and Janet looked at it with a swelling heart.

"Why did I never see this before?" she asked.

"Because it was not yours, but mine, and you were made too much of by him. You never liked me, Janet, and I didn't wish you to like him so well. But now it is yours. Ah! he was a bad husband, and it was all his fault I was in such distress."

In the frequent half-stolen glances Janet took at this picture, she felt that perhaps it was well she had not been allowed again to see and know him. There was something with all the beauty of feature which gave an idea of weakness, and Janet felt in her heart that was this the case, it would have been a terrible disappointment. Then she recalled her own impression of her father, and his misery, which at that time she only guessed at, and the miserable scene which preceded and followed his conviction. The sudden breaking up of her indulged childhood—the awaking to terrible realities of life —of poverty and distress—and worse than poverty; the shuddering horror of those days, the freezing of all her natural affection and love; and then the rescue—the feeling of trust and repose which the presence of Mr. Russell brought at once, and which she never after lost entirely. This excited Janet to tears, for that was all gone, for ever!

How very happy Agnes Spencer might be, was the next thought; and then came a little shiver of loneliness. At this moment in putting her hand in her pocket she felt the letter. While Mrs. Nairn dosed she might read it. The very touch of it brought a curious sense of pleasure and gratification, and yet she dreaded to open it.

Before she had done so Mrs. Nairn awoke in violent pain. For hours there was no pause of relief, and Janet with a sore and frightened heart at witnessing such suffering, exerted herself to minister to her stepmother. She recalled verses from the Bible which she had learnt at Wareham, as a task, when set by Miss Russell or Anna, but impressed for ever on her memory when repeated by Mr. Russell. She was glad now she knew them. She begged her mother to let her summon a clergyman, but got no answer. Then the nurse

said she would fetch a man, a wonderful preacher and maker of prayers, a person sent for to nearly every death-bed in the place. 'Twas wonderful the consolation he brought, she said.

Janet could not say no, and in a short time the woman ushered in a strange, gaunt figure, with a face almost ghastly pale. Looking intently at the sick woman for a moment with his dark eyes, which seemed to Janet to have a lurid light in them, this man threw himself on his knees, and then in a monotonous but not unpleasant voice, he poured forth a wild prayer, that God would again bless his endeavours, and enable him to save this other brand from the burning. Mrs. Nairn grew agitated and excited at first, but in vain did Janet bid him to stop; he did not seem to heed or to hear her.

It was a strange scene, the dim night-light throwing its pale flame on the strongly marked but earnest face of this man;—the dying woman gradually giving up to the mortal heaviness which now weighed on her;—and the slight, graceful, girlish figure, kneeling by her pillow, whose eyes every now and then wandering from her stepmother to the preacher, were the same passionate, yet soft and wild eyes, Jacob Russell had felt strike into his heart, when first led to the lodging on the Quay.

An hour and more passed, and then suddenly the voice ceased, and the man arose, pointing with eager triumph to where the suffering woman lay, in what seemed a quiet sleep.

"I knew I should not fail! I have fought the evil one, and conquered. I have laid him low. Should he venture to disturb her again, you can fetch me. She will die easy now, I think, for has not my prayer cleared the way and tied him down, even hand and foot?"

Without another word he turned and left the room, rather to Janet's relief. The passing hours were marked by the deep, solemn cathedral bell, through the night, but Mrs. Nairn moved not.

Towards dawn, Janet shivered, and looked more closely at the sleeper; and then she knew, that from that sleep there would be no awaking. Mrs. Nairn's journey was ended, her time of trial and probation over.

Worn out and very weary, perplexed too with the different claims urged by tradespeople, poor Janet sat in the little sitting-room. The nurse asked if she had not a friend whose help she could claim at this trying time, but Janet said "No, no one."

By-and-by the thought of the unread letter returned and cheered her a little. Nothing more could be done till the day had fully come, the nurse was in the next room and promised Janet to remain there. It was a good opportunity, and so Janet drew forth the letter and broke the seal. There was part of a letter from Agnes to her brother, which Janet read first. The expressions about herself, and the brother's meeting her so unexpectedly, were touchingly kind and full of affection. There was no bitterness or anger. Agnes was glad her brother had at last been rewarded, and begged him to say everything kind to Janet from her. A few sentences expressive of regret at not being at Wareham, and her fondness for that place, ended abruptly, as the other sheet was not sent.

So Janet, putting that aside, wondered what the other letter could be about. This was not Agnes' writing. It was closely written, and she well knew by whom. Her pulse beat so that she could scarcely steady herself to read this;

and hardly had she got half way through the first page than she bowed her head in a fit of bitter weeping. It was a manly, but kind renewal of the offer of his heart. He said he had never once changed. He had been sorely hurt and pained by her desertion, but he put it down to the worry from Miss Russell and Anna. Certainly Janet had hinted at not feeling a proper love for him; but he had been assured by his mother and sister, as well as the Russells, that this was only the natural shy alarm of a young girl in contemplating so serious a step as marriage. He had asked himself if it was possible, young as she was, that she cared for any one else; but in vain; for who was there for her to love? He had never given it up; he had resolved after a time to seek her again; indeed, he had tried to find Mrs. Nairn's address, and then heard through his sister Eleanor that Janet was no longer with her stepmother, and no one exactly knew where she was. Still he had not despaired.

Then he came on her suddenly, in so strange a manner—he could only look on it as a leading of Providence. He could not judge anything from her manner. He did not wish to hurry her at all: he had made arrangements to go on a yachting expedition, which would probably take three weeks; when he returned he would beg for her answer. He wound up by begging her to get rid of any scruple she might have as to his mother and sister's approval of this step. He promised her an affectionate reception from them, and assured her his one desire was to be able to so surround her with care and love, that all the painful past should be forgotten in the happy present.

It was a letter which no woman could read without being touched; no wonder, then, that Janet, in her present deso-

late position, felt overcome. Hers was a nature which softened and opened under kindness, but was too apt to grow hard and bitter with trial. All her better feelings were now roused. She saw her faults plainly, and blamed herself for ingratitude, for wilful pride, and worse than all, for that terrible, corroding jealousy. Had it not darkened her mind even towards Agnes, that good, faithful friend, who had not cast her off through all her wrong doing? In the midst of sorrow God had raised up friends for her far better than she deserved, and in her proud wilfulness she had only dwelt on the dark side, and forgotten all the benefits showered on her. For her sister Ellen there was large excuse to be made, but for herself none. She had before her eyes every day an example, yet had she ever really and seriously tried to please God, and to seek to walk in His ways? The frightful scene of her stepmother's agony of mind—her dying hours, and the craving for that support and peace which should have been sought before—all tended now to impress Janet with the importance of thinking of another life, another home than this! She was not one to feel and quickly forget, and in this hour Janet made earnest and humble resolutions to strive after a higher and better motive than pride.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BACK AGAIN.

With the day, came many perplexing cares to Janet. The money Mrs. Nairn had spoken of could not be found, and there was little doubt that it had been taken with other things by the disagreeable girl who had been her step-mother's sole servant. The knocker and bell were in constant requisition, from different calls made by the trades-people, who claimed money for provisions not paid for.

Janet was forced to leave the still half-darkened chamber of death, where she had been glad to sit and think, as she perhaps never did before, of all that had passed and was to come. But life and its business could not stand still, and Janet was obliged to gather up all her courage and sense to meet the difficulties that surrounded her. She was growing stupid and giddy with trying to make up the accounts and to ascertain what charges were correct, wondering also, with alarm, where she should find sufficient money to clear off all the debts, when a sharper and louder ring made her look up, and Mr. Green shuffled into the little hot parlour, into which the sun was streaming through the holland blind.

"What, are you turned clerk? My goodness, what heaps of bills! Do you mean these are debts again?"

"I fear, a great many."

"'Tis past belief! How often I warned that poor soul—I couldn't, if I would, allow her more. My income is small, and barely enough to cover my own expenses. She has been a heavy drain on me—aye, a trouble and a care all her life. Yet once she was a handsome girl, very handsome. But she was over-indulged in childhood—always had her own way, and it was generally a wrong one. Bless me! how has the money gone? To my certain knowledge that Mr. Russell was very liberal to her. She was fool enough to give that good-for-nothing girl funds, but I didn't expect any debts."

Then he gruffly told Janet she looked like a ghost, and she might leave all the business to him. He would settle with these men. And of course he must see to putting the poor creature into the ground; there was no one else.

"And so your father is gone, I hear," he said, after he had been looking over some of the bills. "Well, he was a fool for marrying her, though she was my niece. He was too easy; never could say 'No,' I have heard. Fact is, she was getting a little faded, you see, and was eager to get married; but it was a very bad bargain on both sides. And how are you getting on? Does the widow serve you well? And when did you hear anything from your Wareham friends?"

"I never hear now."

"Oh, indeed! But your stepmother did, and pretty often, I fancy. Queer thing that: Russell is, I suppose, one of your universally benevolent men, or why should he take on

himself the burthen of my niece, I can't understand. A crotchety man, evidently, but I fancy he is rich, and doesn't know how to spend his money. No idea of your going back there, I suppose? Well, well, I see 'tis a sore subject, and you are not tired yet of governessing. Do you stay for the funeral? Very well, I shall hurry it on, for there is no good in delay. In three days it shall be. And then I shall give up this house, for I conclude you don't wish to remain here."

Janet said she must return to her work as soon as possible, and declined with thanks the offer Mr. Green made of her spending a couple of days with his invalid niece. It was a great relief to give up the bills, &c. to Mr. Green, and Janet felt grateful to him, for he had shown kindness to her, in spite of his gruff manner. Before she left she tried to speak for Ellen; but she found that a subject he would not have anything to say about.

Then Janet tried the parents of the young man, but they were very angry at the folly and imprudence of the step. They naturally laid the chief blame on Ellen, and said she had thrown herself on their son; they had never approved of the acquaintance, and did not consider Mrs. Nairn by any means a good example for her daughter. They had allowed their son a sum of money sufficient to take him to Australia, where he and his wife must work for themselves, and expect no further help.

Janet wrote to her sister, giving what advice she could and begging Ellen for their father's sake to be steady. She felt she could do no more. Of the party that once gathered round the father's knee, in their comfortable and luxurious home, only herself remained—the petted darling of all; for

whom nothing could be too good; the chief pride and delight of her father.

All this rushing on her mind the last morning, when she vainly tried to eat the toast, and drink the tea, provided by her stepmother's late nurse, made her departure from that poor little house very melancholy. It had proved a refuge in the hour of need, but even that was now gone. The woman was to give up the key directly Janet left; and she was soon off on her way to her pupils.

Would they be glad to see her, she wondered. She had thought sometimes that Julia had some heart; but the other was like her mother, not caring much for any one, though with pleasing and even caressing manners. Janet went back with a new determination to do her duty towards these children: to try and put her heart into her work, not merely get through it as a dry task. This brought a glow to herself, and took off from the feeling of indifference and loneliness. It was not till she had travelled several miles that she remembered Mr. Spencer's letter, and the decision she was expected to make—Yes or No? She could not decide. When she had reasoned herself to a certain point, and pictured to herself that he was what many other girls would gladly catch at—when she had counted up all his good qualities, all the advantages to herself, there always came a hitch—her heart sank with a pang she tried to stifle, but could not. There could be no doubt of his love for her, and it was worth having, but did she, could she return it? She liked him very much, could she not learn in time also to love him? At last she was glad to banish these thoughts,—to put it off, saying there was plenty of time before her. She looked out of the coach-window to watch for the first

peep of the sea, and at last, quite worn out, Janet fell asleep, and only awoke to find herself before the "Golden Crown" hotel, a porter asking if she would have a fly, and Mr. Moore, anxious to spare her any trouble, and full of concern at her being so pale and thin.

"I heard you were to arrive this evening, and I thought as I was passing I would see if I could be of any use. You will find the house empty, for Mrs. Smythe is gone to a large picnic."

Janet asked how it was he was not also at the party, and he said, "He had been there, but was glad to escape. He was not fond of such things, and he should not have gone at all but to please his friend Spencer."

"Is he here then?" asked Janet, quickly, and feeling conscious of a flushed face.

"No; he gives this party on board his yacht at a place nine miles off. He goes away to-morrow to the Channel Islands, I believe. He wanted me to come." And Mr. Moore glanced at Janet's bent face, as if he meant her to ask why he refused the invitation.

"I used to wish to go to Jersey and to Alderney," she said.

"I have not seen them," he replied. "Any other time I should have been only too pleased to go, and Spencer is a capital sailor, and manages his yacht in first-rate style. But I don't care to leave this just now. There are attractions. Miss Nairn, you can't think how dull Mrs. Symthes' parties have been! As to the concert I fancy she has given it up, at all events, till Spencer returns. He is a great favourite now, I assure you."

Janet began to feel uncomfortably conscious of something

in Mr. Moore's manner. He was very kind and full of concern for her comfort, but she was glad when they were at the house and she could say good evening. He did not ask to come in, of course, but he lingered a little and held her hand, while he softly hoped she was in good voice; he was dying to hear that song again!

CHAPTER XXV.

MANY A SLIP BETWEEN CUP AND LIP.

"But where is Julia?" asked Janet, after receiving Amy Smythe's energetic welcome.

"Julia is in bed. Nurse said she was hot, and her head pained her, so she got her into bed, and I think she is asleep."

"And your mamma, does she know Julia is ill?"

"O no! Julia was stupid yesterday, and kept crying at every word mamma said. Mamma said it was cross temper, and she hoped you would soon come and give us lessons again. To-day mamma is gone to some party and won't be back till late, nurse says."

On going to the nursery Janet found Julia very feverish, and the nurse shook her head and said the child had been ailing for two days, and, in her opinion, advice should be had at once. There was no knowing, fever was about——"

It soon became evident that a doctor's care was very necessary, and Janet undertook the responsibility of sending for one directly.

Julia was restless and suffering, but was pleased to see

Janet, and would not allow her to leave her side. But the doctor warned her that the disease was catching; he pronounced it to be scarlet fever, and advised that Amy should be kept away.

Tired as she was, from all her work and anxiety of the past week, Janet remained by the sick child, awaiting the mother's return, which did not take place till eleven o'clock. And then Mrs. Everly Smythe was in dismay. She had a horror of all fevers, particularly scarlet. Why had Miss Nairn been so rash and foolish as to go into the room? She might have taken charge of Amy somewhere—but now——"

"Now," Janet pleaded, "let me stay and nurse Julia, and you can go with Amy if you like."

After much fuss this was agreed to, and every one in the house worked hard to pack Mrs. Smythe's things, that she and her other child might start in the morning. The nurse was to remain with Janet and the rest of the servants, except the lady's-maid.

Sultry and extremely hot weather set in, and the third day after Mrs. Smythe's departure the housemaid was taken ill. The cook was frightened and would not go near her. The consequence was that Janet and the nurse had all the labour and fatigue.

Janet did not spare herself. Young and eager, she taxed her strength to the utmost, and felt more than repaid for her weary and anxious watches, when Julia kissed her hand, or looked lovingly at her. An ardent attachment sprang up in Janet for this child. No one could smooth the pillows, or soothe her restless fits but Janet. Often it was only by Janet's singing that Julia got any sleep.

Sometimes she got away for an hour or two, but more often

she lay down on a couch in the room, when some rest was imperative.

All this time George's letter was laid by. She could not answer it then.

At last the fever abated—after a fearful battle. On the very day the poor housemaid died, Julia awoke refreshed by a long sleep, and the doctor said that she was out of danger, if proper nourishment was given. And Janet was more anxious than ever not to leave her, feeling that all depended humanly on constant care. In vain the nurse and the doctor advised her to spare herself and take some real rest. She could not. The fact was, that whenever she fell asleep she had painful dreams about Mr. Russell, and she dreaded going to bed.

The three weeks mentioned by Mr. Spencer had now come to an end. Julia was better, and had been sitting up in a great chair for the first time, and Janet, after telling her a story, had gone to her room hoping to get rid of a headache. It struck her suddenly that George Spencer would be returning for his answer, and she sat down once more to prove her feelings and try to decide. But her head was giddy and she could not control her thoughts. One thing alone kept constantly before her—that Mr. Russell had given her up; after saying he forgave her he had deserted her.

She felt sore and angry. She tried to assure herself that it was "no matter, she had a friend still! Let him go!" Perhaps if he ever did marry Agnes, he would one day feel how wrong he had been, and she should have an opportunity of proving that she was independent of him. Perhaps from helping her stepmother, and because of her unfortunate

speeches, he had fancied they could not do without him. Mrs. Nairn had doubtless flattered him very much and even represented Janet as being ready to be his very slave. Her cheeks got hot at the bare idea! She could so well fancy her stepmother's speeches. She walked up and down, trying to feel very haughty and indifferent, but it would not do, and she burst into a violent fit of weeping.

A servant gently opened the door, hoping Miss Nairn slept, but a note had been left with "immediate" on it, and she thought she must bring it at once.

Janet could scarcely read the writing, but she knew it was from George Spencer. After bathing her head and eyes she managed to make it out—only a few words, hoping that she was not the worse for the trouble he had heard about from Mrs. Smythe; reminding her of the time, and hoping he was not indelicate in pressing for an end to his suspense. He had intended coming back to hear his fate from her own lips, but he now felt he could not face it. Therefore he begged her to send a line to him. He should hold himself ready—how ready, he could not say—to obey her summons directly.

"Yes, I must write," Janet said to herself, and walked slowly to the table on which was her desk. "I cannot disappoint him; after all, why should I not be happy in making him so? I cannot say 'no,' or refuse such a true affection. Yet——" She turned to draw a chair to her when a sudden giddeness overcame her and she fell.

A long time passed, and every one kept quiet hoping that "poor Miss Nairn was sleeping." Julia tried to be patient and allow the nurse to put her to bed, but she wanted Miss Nairn she said.

At last, when it grew dark, some one went softly to the room, and getting no answer, went in. There lay Janet still insensible. In falling she had pulled down the table and her desk, and the last had given a slight cut on her forehead. They lifted her, and put her on her bed; when the doctor came, he said Janet had the fever in a severe form.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MEETING.

It had been raining without intermission all day, and the High Street looked as dismal as it could look, with dripping umbrellas, and splashed petticoats, and of these not by any means many. Two gentlemen, each holding his umbrella low to keep off the blinding drops, came in awkward fashion, and with no slight shock against each other. An impatient expression, more natural than proper, escaped from the slighter of the two, who perhaps got the worst of it; while the other began a mild apology; each receded a step and each lifted his umbrella and glanced out. One umbrella was of silk, a first-rate article with an uncommon and fanciful handle. The other was more useful than ornamental and by no means new.

"Hallo! Why, in the name of all that's surprising, can this be you, Russell?"

"Spencer, George Spencer! my dear fellow, how are you?" was ejaculated by each at the same moment, and a great shaking of hands ensued, and further questions, which, however, left no space for answers. Then, perceiving that they

were inconveniencing the public by blocking up the pavement, they went on together.

"Where are you bound for?" asked Mr. Spencer.

"For home. Just landed after a rough voyage, and am now arrived from London."

"You seem to fall into storms and rough weather. No wreck this time, I hope?"

"No. May I ask where you are now—where is your home, I mean?"

"Home, in the usual sense, I have none. I am staying here at present, that is, for a night, but I hope to be off again to-morrow."

After an interchange of questions about their respective relations, it was agreed that they should dine together at the inn. Mr. Russell said he had been walking about the town on a somewhat anxious errand, and was tired. He was evidently weary and low, but rallied himself and talked pleasantly of his visit to Spain and adventures, showing so much quiet humour and appreciation of scenery, that his companion thought he had seldom met with a pleasanter man, and once more inwardly gave his consent to his having his favourite sister if he wished it.

But after the subject of his journey was pretty well exhausted, Mr. Russell relapsed into his former air of fatigue, and a certain constraint crept over both, in spite of their mutual pleasure at meeting.

It was not till quite late, and when they were on the point of separating for the night, that Mr. Russell said—

"And won't you soon run down to Wareham? I am sure my sisters would be pleased to see you."

"Thank you—but—no; I can't go there at present. I

shall return to S—— very soon, I fancy. Meanwhile, I am trying to be patient, and not too uneasy. When do you return to Wareham?"

"To-morrow, I hope. But I must have one more hunt. The man I want to see happens, very unusually, to be absent, and I am ignorant where he is, or——"

"By the way," interrupted Mr. Spencer, speaking rapidly, "I believe you have seen—that is—— Didn't you know something of Mrs. Nairn?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Russell, surprised. And then, seeing the constrained nervous look and manner, and guessing the difficulty it might be to Mr. Spencer to introduce the name, he added—

"Yes, I knew the poor woman. And I saw Janet after she had gone to her stepmother. To-day I went to the old house, but found it occupied by strangers, and at a baker's near I heard that Mrs. Nairn was dead. But no one could tell me of—of—her daughter: that is, they said she had run away with a young tradesman, but that couldn't be Janet."

"*She* is at S——, and I left her very ill," said George Spencer, gravely.

"Janet! And how came she to be at S——? And you say she is ill?"

"You were not aware, then, that she is living with Mrs. Everly Smythe, a young widow, as governess to the children, and companion, in a fashion, to the lady herself? By the way, I gathered from a few hints, and more from manner, that she is much hurt at your desertion. But I suppose you found it difficult to—to keep up any intercourse, when the Miss Russells disapproved so much. I fear they have not learnt to forgive her. I must try to get them to do so;—for

my sake, I hope," he added, with a peculiarly gentle, even entreating look.

There was silence then for a moment or two, then Mr. Russell said—

"Do I understand rightly? Let me be clear. Can you mean——?" Then beginning again, after clearing his voice, "Spencer, have you renewed your suit?"

"I have. Providence has brought us again together, just as I began to despair and give it all up, for I could hear nothing about her. I am awaiting my sentence. It is this illness which has delayed it."

"You must be very fond of her, Spencer?" Mr. Russell said, gravely, and half as if speaking to himself.

"God knows, I am! They say there is but one rea attachment in one's life. I feel it to be true. I know this is mine. I think I have proved it. If she refuses me now, I may possibly still marry; probably I shall, for I am a domestic animal, and long for a home; but it will be a very different thing from this. Can you give me any hope or encouragement?"

"I! Good Heavens, no! That is—I have not seen her for so long, how can I possibly know? But what do you think yourself? You must, I suppose, have seen cause for hope?"

"Sometimes one thing, sometimes another. She has owned that she likes me better—thinks me improved. And then, perhaps she is more gentle and kind herself, though proud still, very proud! But saddened, poor little soul! Sometimes I hope that her experience of life and its troubles—the peculiar trials of her position—may influence her in my favour. Perhaps my former nonsense may have led her to

doubt my sincerity. Now I believe she feels I am true, and she values my regard. I have caught a look—what a look it was!—I have heard a ring, or tremor, in her voice—I could almost call it tenderness—and it has sent me away nearly mad, intoxicated. Then her next speech would knock this all down: and she was scarcely friendly. I think sometimes I may have been premature; but, however, it is done, and my fate is now in her hands. Russell, can you at all guess—did she ever tell you, what was her real reason for cutting me before?"

"Well, once I asked her. She answered me; but I think we had better leave her to tell you herself, Spencer."

"You are right. It was strange. I never can understand it. Sometimes I fancied it must be a previous attachment. Then, again, who did she know? Not a soul she would be likely to care for."

"As you say, who was there? She was very sensitive, and very fastidious, even as a child."

Mr. Spencer remained, with his head buried in his hands, plunged in a maze of fears and hopes. Mr. Russell respected his silence, and kept up his usual walk, to-and-fro, also in serious thought. Occasionally he stopped for a moment, and looked earnestly at his companion, his lips quivered, and his eyes lighted up as if about to speak. But he checked the rising words, and again resumed his walk.

The candles slowly burnt on, flickering a little as the breeze came through the muslin-curtains. A sphinx moth found its way in, and flew heavily round. The rain had ceased, and the clouds were hurrying on, so as every now and then to allow the moon to appear; the grand old cathedral was thrown into strong relief, and the shadows

came out deeply. It was a singularly quiet hotel, the distant street noises, and an occasional foot-passenger, were the only sounds, save the beautiful bells, which told every quarter.

At last Mr. Russell came to the table to rescue the half-burnt moth. He threw it out of window, and then paused, looking out on the cathedral-yard. When he turned again, he asked in a gentle, grave way, peculiar to himself—

"You say she is ill. I hope she is well cared for?"

"I hope so too; but Mrs. Smythe took fright, and left her to nurse her child. I don't fancy she has returned. She talks of the duty of taking due precaution, and all that sort of thing. But I believe there is a good nurse and clever doctor, and Janet is liked by the servants."

Mr. Russell sighed.

"When do you think you shall know? But you won't hurry her, Spencer? I dare say she ought to be kept very quiet just now."

"Of course. But she was better, and I fully expect to find still further improvement to-morrow. She is young, you see, and will soon throw it off."

"I trust in Heaven she may."

"You will give me your good wishes, I am sure? You would think me a fool, or mad, if you knew how I hang everything on her saying 'yes.' I can't imagine life without her, and disappointment seems to upset me so terribly. How can a man get over such a thing? I declare I can't understand it! Yet, I suppose some do?"

"Some must: some do. Love is much, very much—words fail to express what it is—but yet it is not all!—not all! thank God for it! To struggle, to overcome—this is man's portion, as we all must learn, at one time or another

And there's something sublime in it. Aye, and it brings a recompense even here. Yes, men do 'get over it,' as the saying is. They live on, feeling their very heart strings crack one by one: at one moment numb and cold; again, alive to agony, feeling forsaken, deserted, lonely among men. Then they seek and they find help. Time is short. Eternity lies beyond, and there is work to do. Another hope rises, and grows brighter and nearer. Every year they see plainer that home, not made with hands, where there is no marrying nor giving in marriage. All the better part of love, all that is unearthly and unselfish, will not be lost or perish. Some day, the longing, thirsty heart will be satisfied."

Mr. Russell had been carried on by his feelings to forget his usual reserve. When the tones of his solemn but tender voice ceased to vibrate, George Spencer almost cried out for him to "go on."

"If I were like you, Russell; but I am quite another sort of fellow." Then, holding out his hand, and saying "Good night," he added—"But how is it you know all this? Ah! I suspect you—— Well, I have your good wishes; eh?"

"My wishes? Well, yes; my wishes for your happiness and for hers. Good night."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SUMMONS.

Two days after the meeting of Mr. Russell and Mr. Spencer, the former was once again in the cold, precise sitting-room of No. 1, Queen's Terrace. There, in her straight-backed chair, was Miss Russell, knitting a very unshaped and rough grey stocking; there, also, was Anna, with her small ringlets and velvet *bandeau*, surrounded, as usual, with card-paper and bits of ribbon.

"Of course, Jacob," Miss Russell said, "you will do as you like; and your notions are about as fantastic and foolish as can be. What was the use of going to Spain, I should like to know, if now, directly you are here, you get into mischief?"

"My going to Spain was, I thought, to settle our business there," observed Mr. Russell, with a slight but immediately suppressed look of amusement. Then he added, gravely—"It grieves me much to go against your wish, just as I come home, too; but this is a case of such urgency: I should never forgive myself—never be happy again, if—if—she died, having asked for me, without my seeing her."

"As to dying, most likely she is a long way off that. People like to exaggerate, and, because she is ill, say, of course, that she is 'dying.' She'll recover; don't fear. Unless she is wonderfully altered, she's not much fitted to die. It is only a stratagem to get you there, and work on your feelings. It is shameful! I found out, from Penn, that you were constantly sending supplies of money to that wretched, abandoned woman. Now she is dead, and her child will try to get more out of you. Jacob, I warn you again; you are acting from impulse; some utter folly possesses you, and, if you don't struggle against it, it will bring some harm. After all that has passed, you have no right to have anything to do with that girl. She is not proper: all the teaching she got could not change her breeding. Just conceive what Miss Rose heard—yes, your own particular friend, Miss Rose. She heard, from some acquaintance, one of her gay friends, that—that—pshaw! I can't pronounce her name—that the girl is living with some widow, who is more gay than respectable, quite a noted flirt and fashionist; and at her parties, made up for the most part of gay men, not too respectable, by any means, the girl is made a sort of puffing advertisement of—dressed out, and set up to play and sing, and, in short, catch the silly fools who like a pair of dark eyes, and all that. This ought to open your eyes, if anything ever will, when a man is bewitched by a girl."

"My dear sister, I assure you——"

"My dear brother, you can't assure me, so don't try," she interrupted, with severe mockery.

"George Spencer told me about this Mrs. Everly Smythe. No doubt not the most desirable of places for her, or any young girl; but as to her—as to Janet being what you say, indeed,

you are wrongly informed; and it is George Spencer who now writes, in extreme distress, poor fellow, bidding me come at once, as a sudden turn has taken place, and she is in a most precarious state. It seems she has called for me in her delirium. You remember, when she was so ill here, how her head wandered, and how often you both sought me, even sending to the Quay for me to soothe her?"

"She was a child then."

"Well, and she is not much more now in years; and, no doubt, she goes back to childhood in her deliriums, and perhaps, who knows, I may have a power to quiet her nerves. Some persons do this, you know."

"I know no such nonsense. Pack of stuff about soothing nerves! Somebody's "soothing syrup" for infants is all I know about it; and that, all respectable medical men say, is rank poison. Soothing, indeed! Don't throw dust in my eyes! don't try to hoodwink me, Jacob! I know all about it, and I'm ashamed of you."

"But, sister, Mr. Spencer has offered again, so Jacob says; and, if she is really so ill, one wouldn't like not to answer to any appeal. It is really affecting! She may just want to ask our forgiveness, you know, and all that sort of thing, and then Jacob will give her his blessing, and, poor soul, her end will be better than her beginning."

"Anna, don't talk such rubbish," said her sister, severely. "And, now, here are you, turning round at the last—you, who have all along been only more decided than myself in keeping her off. I do hate weak wills, changeable minds. If a thing is once right, 'tis always right, and——"

"Surrounding circumstances may alter the aspect of everything," suggested Mr. Russell.

"Such circumstances being, of course, that artful women, having woven a net, silly men are deluded into setting their feet in it. You're all alike! Good gracious! that young Spencer should be so blind, so bound up in a girl with a comely countenance, but a vile temper, and no stability of character, no breeding, no connexion. Well, well; the world's growing daft, I believe. But a weak, vain woman has always been at the bottom of mischief, and, I suppose, always will; and so Jacob, who ought to know better, must fain follow suit, and gallivant after a little excitement: for it is just that, and nothing else. Men love to have their vanity tickled: a little flattery will turn any man's head. Pray, is the other one there too?"

"The other one?"

"I mean the one with the long curls, Mr. Spencer's sister, of course," Miss Russell answered, testily.

"No; she is not there; nor do I know where she is just now."

"Well, certainly, of the two, *I* shouldn't doubt which is prettiest. There's something pleasant enough in her; she has a good temper, too. I am sorry, for your sake, she's not there—'twould have been a better excuse."

"But, sister, you know that is only fancy, after all," put in Anna. "I told you that Eleanor Spencer mentioned in confidence that Agnes is likely to be soon engaged elsewhere. I hope Jacob won't be much disappointed; but he ought to have spoken sooner."

"Anna, do hold your tongue," said her sister, reprovingly, and glancing at her brother, to see if he had heard.

But her fear was unfounded; for Mr. Russell was standing by the window, lost in thought; and, according to a habit of

his, he had ceased to hear or to heed what passed for a few moments.

"Good-bye," he said presently, and holding out his hand; but he was obliged to take his sister's, knitting and all, while with the other she shifted her glasses, and then looked over them sternly at him.

"Won't you let me say just one word, one kind word from you, in case I find her so very ill?" he asked, gently, and stooping to kiss her forehead.

"Pshaw! If she is dying in truth, she'll have other things to think of. But you may bid her remember all I tried so vainly to teach her, and tell her to repent of her dreadful faults."

"Yes: that is what we all need to do;" and bidding "Good-bye" to Anna, he left the room.

At S——, Mr. Russell found George Spencer awaiting him. He tried to judge from his face what news he had to give of the invalid, but this was difficult. There was too much brightness to allow him to suppose the worst, and yet too much agitation, Mr. Russell thought, to bode good.

"My dear fellow, I'm so glad you're come. 'Tis really very good of you and your sisters. What must they think of me and my summons? Oh, yes, it is all right: she rallied an hour after my letter went, and is now really better—quite recovering, in fact."

"In that case, I am not wanted, and I think I had better return directly."

"On no account. Why, I have anxiously been looking out for you: you are very much wanted, and I'll explain how, if you'll just come in here. You see, Russell," continued Mr. Spencer, in a nervous, fidgety manner, "I am in

a fever of suspense. I—really I cannot go on any longer: 'Yes,' or 'No,' I must have directly. It is hard, very hard, that I may not have the right to act for her, the right to see her. Poor girl! she must be horribly lonely; and, you see, she is one to feel the position so keenly. And this widow, I suspect, is not too soft-hearted. Women are strange beings: and, with all the playful, fascinating manner Mrs. Everly Smythe has, her heart is as hard as flint. Fancy, her never coming even inside the house to see this poor girl, leaving the place short of servants, too, I find! for she sent for them, while Janet was so ill, to join her at another place she has taken. But, thank God, Janet is better. That sudden turn passed almost as quickly as it came. She is lying on the couch, I hear, and has seen a kind neighbourly soul who called."

"Thank God!" said Mr. Russell, with a long sigh of relief.

"But you see, don't you, that I couldn't help sending for you? I fear I have alarmed you, and all for nothing, as it turns out; but——"

"You did quite rightly; and I advise you, Spencer, to rest, or you will be ill next: you are looking ill now."

"Oh, I shall be all right, if I can only be sure. It has been a dreadfully anxious time. Fancy the doctor saying she would not live out the night! and these ignorant servants actually threatening to run away—couldn't be in the house with a dying person! And there was I, in the parlour below, or at the door, dreading, but waiting for every sound and every step. 'Twas dreadful! And then she was delirious, and called out for you. She raved and sobbed, they said, because some one had deserted her, and left her to some

cruel fate: all nonsense, of course. But once, when the doors were open, I heard her, and, on my word, 'twas more than I could bear: she was singing snatches of songs; and then, so piteously, she asked you to forgive her. I declare, Russell, I couldn't help being rather jealous, you know."

But the slight attempt at playfulness in these last words died out with a sudden pang of fear, when he turned, and saw Mr. Russell, with his face buried in his hands, on the sofa-back, his strong frame heaving with suppressed agitation. Mr. Spencer did not speak again, but looked at his friend with alarm and surprise, all his late restless nervousness sobered at once. The seeing him, who was in general so calm and self-controlled, overcome, and, with all his evident efforts, unable to stem the rush of passionate emotion, effectually silenced Mr. Spencer's somewhat egotistical flow of words. He felt, for a moment, self-reproved, at having lost sight of the deep, silent, unselfish tenderness of this man's heart. In an instant all the former time flashed on him, when he and his sister Agnes had often spoken with wonder of the strong affection which subsisted between Mr. Russell and his ward. Trifles unnoticed, or nearly so, at the time, now seemed to rise up with a new and vivid colouring. For some days, he had looked on himself as Janet's sole friend, —his own grief, his despair, at the chance of losing her, had alone filled his mind. When he sent the urgent summons to Mr. Russell, it was from the feeling that she desired to see him; anything to relieve or please her;—nothing could be too much or too difficult. But he had forgotten Mr. Russell and his interest. And now there was the re-action of sharp self-blame for not thinking of so unselfish a person. All Mr.

Russell's self-denying, simple goodness—his whole life of unostentatious kindness, seemed to be opened before him, as it had never been before. With his habitual impulsiveness, George Spencer went up to Mr. Russell and touched his shoulder.

"I do beg your pardon: I am a selfish, thoughtless creature."

"You did right," interrupted his friend, gravely and quietly. He had again mastered himself, and, though his face was pale, and every feature seemed to bear the mark of the struggle, he looked calmly and kindly in Mr. Spencer's face. Reading there the young man's contrition, he laid his hand on his arm.

"I thank you from my heart for bringing me here. I don't deserve it. I—but all is well now, and you say she is better;—is she out of danger? Are you sure? And did I understand rightly, that you said she had been neglected? No wonder that she blamed me! And she might have died with this thought of me in her heart."

He rose quickly, as if some uncontrollable impulse seized him, gave a low, deep sigh, and then, pressing his hands together, he said,—

"But how am I to help you now? Of course it is hard for you to be in this suspense; but is she in a state for any agitating subject to be brought before her?"

"Why need it agitate her? She has had some time to think of it. I suspect it is only this illness which has caused the delay. If only I might be admitted to see her, even without speaking, just to look at her. The very consent would speak volumes. I should be more than content. I should read my fate at the first glance at her tell-tale face.

She must be so lonely—and—perhaps—why shouldn't my presence be just a little comfort to her?"

"As you say—why not? Have you asked admittance? Have you seen the doctor?"

"Yes; and he says she ought to be cheered—that her spirits are low and variable. In fact, he broadly hinted at some agitating subject—something weighing on her mind. I believe he suspects the truth. I am sure from his manner that he would sanction my being allowed just to go to her room."

"Then why not?" And with a sudden working of the lips he added, "And I wonder—might I be admitted? You see, as—as her friend—her guardian—and all that—and my extremely respectable appearance (with a slight smile), as far as my bald head and aged looks go—don't you think I may be suffered to see her?"

"Of course—why not? And that is just what I mean. You will see her; and just in your own quiet way (which you know she always liked), you can bring in my name, and say a good word for me. In fact, Russell, I shall always be grateful to you, if you will do this for me—your opinion always had weight with Janet."

"I cannot. You ask too much—that is,—I mean, it is not my place. You do not need my help, surely? You must have had a certain security that you would not be repulsed, before you again ventured to propose, had you not? These things are best left alone, believe me."

"Yes, I agree there, generally. But now, don't you see, what I want is an answer. And here you can help me. It will be more proper for you to see her now. I can only see her under one condition. It must be my *right*, don't you understand?"

"And you want me to—to ask leave for you to see her?"

"Yes—as her guardian, in the place of a father you have a right——"

"Her father is dead, I understand. So perhaps now she may allow me to stand in that light—that is—— Well, I suppose I might easily pass as such?" and as he smiled, he sighed.

"I don't know about that; but any way you are just one of those men who are privileged to do anything. No one is afraid of or shy with you. All the bashful young things look on you as something safe."

"As how I wonder? Because I am beyond the pale of matrimony, I suppose? The very idea in connexion with me is ridiculous. Is that it?"

"I don't say that at all, my dear fellow. On the contrary; but I am not going to flatter you up now. Though in my heart, remember, I don't subscribe to your being such a very safe man. I don't know if I would always trust you in my fold, if I was a mamma!"

"There's a bell!" put in Mr. Russell, with a nervous glance towards the door, towards which footsteps were heard approaching.

It was the servant, to say that Miss Nairn had been "taking on greatly," because she was sure she heard the voice of some one she knew. "If it was the gent Miss Nairn was told might possibly come, would he please walk up a minute?"

"I sent word that I expected you here," explained George Spencer.

The maid was told that Mr. Russell was ready to come at any moment.

"You will do the best you can for me, won't you?" said Mr. Spencer, flurriedly, while taking up and putting down everything that came within reach. He was surprised, when getting no answer, he turned round, and saw Mr. Russell leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, and his head on his hand, with a face from which all colouring had vanished, and a set, but sad look of resolution on every feature.

"Anything for her happiness. If I see, Spencer—if I feel sure that it will be for her happiness, I—yet, what nonsense this is, for what after all can I or any one do?"

"Her happiness is of course—we may take that for granted, I hope. Certainly I don't wish her to make herself unhappy for my sake," Mr. Spencer answered, with an attempt at a joke; but he added, gravely enough, "Surely you know what I mean? Just give a hint of my state of mind, aggravated tenfold by knowing her to be ill and friendless here. Of course you must know how she has always been guided by you. One word——"

"In this affair I cannot—I altogether decline attempting to guide her. You can't expect this of me. It would be too much—too——"

"Well, well—just tell her I am a second Job—but, I throw myself on her generosity. I don't want her to talk, or to talk myself. All has been said. But let me only come to her room, and I shall be the happiest man alive. Now—won't you go at once?" he added, opening the door.

But Mr. Russell's steps were strangely lingering, and, as George Spencer thought, reluctant.

"You seem——the fact is, Russell, I'm a selfish brute! You are faint, and have had no food—and here am I prating

and urging you on. But wait if you like. I declare you are pale!"

"No, I am well. And it is best not to keep her waiting. But remember it is long since I saw her, and—the fact is, I don't seem to know anything, it is all so strange, so sudden, since I arrived in England. Do you wait here?"

"No," Mr. Spencer said; "he should take a turn on the esplanade, and be back in good time."

So each went his way.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNEXPECTED RESULTS.

"I CANNOT account for it, Janet! I assure you that I wrote to you directly I knew I was going to Spain. It grieved me to go away so far just then; but affairs were bad, and my sister was uneasy, and judged my presence essential. I have now given up all connexion with the Spanish house. But, Janet, I wrote fully to you, and begged you to apply to my clerk Penn in case of any trouble—he having money in hand for your own special use, and for your stepmother. I believe that she got what she wanted; she did not tell me where you were gone at first. She even assured me that you had never given her the right address. But on my writing again for it, I got the one I put on my letter. And you never received it?"

"No."

"No wonder, poor child, that you set me down as a faithless, bad guardian! And it grieved you, Janet? You wished sometimes to see, or at least to hear of your old friend?"

His voice had that tender but mournful tone she knew so well, and that once heard could scarcely be forgotten. Weak

as Janet was now, it was almost more than she could bear; it was such a mingling of happiness that touched on sorrow, of joy pointed with pain. She bent her head, and could not control her tears.

Janet had been very ill. The worry and anxiety of her stepmother's illness, the sudden news of her father's death, following so closely on George Spencer's reappearance and renewal of attention, and then finally the fatigue from nursing her pupil, had knocked her down. During her fever George Spencer's letter had weighed on her like an incubus, as something she must attend to and settle—something to think out, though all connected thought was become impossible. In the intervals, when a little less ill and suffering, she had tried to probe her heart, or rather to judge what was best for her to do. But the constant repetition of the same reasons in favour of the proposal when it was only a feeling, but a terribly powerful and obstinate feeling which weighed in the other scale, wearied her. It had been a brief but painful time, when every shadow of her life arose and mingled in weird confusion, like a nightmare dream, when Mr. Russell and his sisters, her stepmother and Mrs. Spencer, had appeared successively like spectres haunting her pain-stricken bed. She knew she had talked wildly, and now had the uncomfortable knowledge that she had spoken of things she wished to guard jealously from the view of any one, to strangers, without knowing exactly what she had said, or daring to ask.

After a distressing night of delirium, she had been told by the woman attending on her that her friend had been sent for, and when she asked what friend, and they told her Mr. Russell, of Wareham, such a sense of comfort and security

had settled on her, that the illness took a favourable turn, and from that hour she grew better. The recovery was rapid after that, to a certain point, but still she was weak enough, and looked too much altered, not to give Mr. Russell a little shock.

"And you wondered not to hear?" he repeated, gently touching her bent head.

"It nearly broke my heart," she sobbed out, impetuously; "but it is no matter now!" she added, with an impatient toss of her head, as if by that gesture she shook off the subject.

"And yet, Janet, I hear—I understand that you have had other things to think of. The heart was not quite broken, I hope, since the possession of it is craved by—by——"

"Don't joke about it!" she exclaimed, hastily. "I should not have thought—that's hardly like you." And again her voice broke down.

The slight smile which had touched his lips faded away as he said, gravely, "You are right. No; it is no subject for joke. Yet, Janet, I hope it is a subject for—congratulation, shall I say? Is it a source of pleasure to you?"

She did not answer.

"It must be a very true attachment. He is very much in earnest, Janet."

Still no answer, and the head bent down.

"He has been much grieved and distressed all this time—very anxious, and——"

"Did he expect I could write when I was ill?" she asked, sharply.

"He was distressed at your being so neglected, so without a friend, and——"

"Not more than usual," she said, abruptly.

"Naturally enough," he continued, in a gentle, soothing tone, though just a little tremulous, "he wished to be able to assume, as his right, the place of friend. I don't think he is selfish, or wishes to hurry you in any way; but—if you could——" Here was a slight pause, and Mr. Russell cleared his voice, and opened and shut a book lying near him. "In fact, he begged me to ask if he might just see you—only see you. But don't distress yourself, my dear child; he will wait patiently, I am sure. He does not wish to talk, or make you talk—only to come here for a little."

Janet looked up, and, with a quick, impetuous movement, drew a writing-case towards her. She opened it, and took out a sheet of paper, on which just three words and the date appeared to be written. "I had begun this—the answer. It wasn't my fault that I was stricken down with the fever, literally as I wrote this! I fell, and the desk on me. Tell him that!"

"Then you had made up your mind—you had decided?"

"I believe so." And down went the head again. There was silence for a short space, broken, at last, by Janet's exclaiming, in a broken, distressed voice: "I suppose so—I don't know. If I had ten years more to consider, it would be the same thing—so much in favour, and——"

"Yes, doubtless, everything can be said in favour of it, I suppose. But is there—did you mean that there was anything against it?

Deep-drawn, choking sobs were the only answer.

"I ought not to have begun this, I see. But, Janet, tell me, is there anything against it—and what is it? I need not again," he went on, "speak of the worldly advantages—

once I did so; but one can hardly say too much for such a disinterested, honourable affection. And I suppose—I conclude—you are sure that, on your part, even if it should happen not to be so strong—(mind, I am not assuming the fact, but only supposing the case)—not so deep a feeling on your part as you might wish, yet you love him better than any one else? Yes, *now* I may say, than any one in the world, since your poor father is gone! This is so—eh, Janet?" and he took her hand; but she pulled it from him, and turned quite away from him, leaning her face on the arm of her easy-chair.

"No!—I tell you, no!" she exclaimed, passionately.

"No!" he repeated. "Is it possible? But who then——?" He got up and walked to and fro,—apparently forgetful of her being still an invalid—agitated, shaken strangely, and beyond all immediate power of control. Once he paused, and looked at her as she hung over the chair, her face hidden by her hands, and only her small, shapely head, with the old coils of abundant hair, visible. He tried to speak, but could not; and then walked on again. Then he stopped just behind her, and laid a trembling, but strong and gentle, hand on her head. "Janet! tell me who do you love better?" His voice was husky and low. He felt her tremble, and saw her shiver; but there was no answer. Again he spoke, and this time his voice had a ring in it which seemed to vibrate on her pulses, and excite her like a call from a trumpet. "Who —*who* is it, Janet? Speak! Look at me!" And he firmly removed her hands, and clasped both in his own. "Janet!" he went on, half kneeling, to bring himself more on a level with her. "I entreat—I desire you to speak!" She gave one rapid look at him; but then dropped her eyes again, and

shook with a convulsive sob. He let go her hands, and arose from the bending posture. Again he took a step, as if about to return to his pacing to and fro; but, instead, he drew forward a chair in front of her. "God help me and forgive me if I am wrong!" she thought he said. "Janet! Janet! my little darling, is it so?" and he held out his arms.

She bent towards him, and he drew her close for one instant; then she suddenly withdrew, sobbing out, half fretfully, half proudly: "No; I won't have it! You pity me. I don't want pity—I hate it. Go!"

"Pity!—I pity you! Look at me, Janet. But, no! I can't tell you—I have no words. If your own heart doesn't tell you all the struggle of mine—the pain—the misery—— Pity! My God! it is for her to pity me! Janet, *now* don't you see and feel the—the truth? Don't you know that I love you—have long loved you—more, better than anything? Only I dared not—no! I dared not!"

"Why? If it is wrong, beneath you, or against your principles,—go! and let me alone."

"Gently! I dared not, simply because, though I well knew I loved you—loved you madly—I never once, not for a moment, thought that it was returned. I did not suppose your rejection of Mr. Spencer was from—— Janet, tell me, was it because you returned my feelings, even then?"

"What other reason could there be?" was all her answer.

* * * * * *

Janet was tired, and her face showed it. And there was Mr. Spencer waiting for the result of the interview! Mr. Russell said nothing to her of his dread at meeting him; but his own anxious and still troubled countenance showed how much it disturbed this first hour of happiness. By his own

feelings he judged the pain he had to give. Mr. Russell's had not been an untried life. Had he been one to tell of such things, he might have spoken of many a painful struggle, many a sharp disappointment, and not a few of those battles from which a man comes forth, if alive and victorious, yet covered with scars; yet, perhaps, in no moment had he felt more thoroughly uncomfortable. It was almost like guilt—the guilt of faithlessness towards a trusting friend. For one short instant he was giddy—overwhelmed by a horror at his cruel selfishness. Had he not stepped in at the last, and taken the cup of water from his friend's craving lips? The thought was intolerable—maddening! He actually turned to go back and tell Janet he renounced her. She belonged to another—what right had he to her? After so many and such hard struggles against his own deep love, what cowardice, what treachery, to give up at last! What could have led him to be so faithless to his own convictions? But—there was another aspect. What was that flashing look—that tone in her voice, which had, for one brief instant, thrown light on the darkness, as vivid lightning might do? Was it, after all, for him to renounce in favour of another? And once more the blessed truth shone on him, driving away all phantom shapes bred of a morbid or too scrupulous a fancy. He might stifle his own love—but hers? No! he had not been treacherous; he had done all a man could—too much, perhaps. He had been blind and deaf. George Spencer must see it rightly, and would, in time, if not now, do him justice, even amidst his own pain. Still, he heartily wished he could escape the interview. If only the truth might be broken by any one else! These pangs and doubts were but momentary, however, and were set aside by the firm, quiet courage a long

course of self-discipline, and not self-reliance, had given him.

As he was passing out at the front door to find George Spencer on the Promenade, a servant appeared, and said that Mr. Spencer had just left, but had written a note and put it on the drawing-room table.

It did not take long for Mr. Russell to turn back to the drawing-room, and find the note with its bold, hastily-blotted direction.

"Dear Russell,—I have been thinking, and a sudden revelation has come to me. In going over our late conversation your words and your looks have taken a new meaning. What a fool and dolt I am! But I see it all now! I can't face you. I feel sure how it is. Well, it can't be helped! I am a poor miserable wretch, and Heaven only knows what will become of me! You are better than I. But, Russell, not even you can love her better than I do! Don't think I blame you—you've been a hero. Old fellow, you'll have your reward now at last. Tell her I'll try not to hate you, and to forget her. I know how it is. Blind, blind, and you—how could you not see and feel it all long ago? I'm off in the yacht—anywhere. The yard and a good rope, but no—bad as I am—not this. You'll give me a corner in your best thoughts. Well, God bless you both! Ah, she'll be happy at last! How she must hate me—the presuming fool who came between her and the light! Yours miserably.

G. S."

CHAPTER XXIX.

EXPLANATIONS.

Every one said it was one of the hottest days they ever remembered. Wareham literally glittered from the glare and refraction. It was a lazy day, the very waves coming in with tiny curls as if shy of the baked pebbles.

Fishermen and sailors idled about, with the never-failing solace—a pipe; or a few of the more energetic were mending sails or nets. Mr. Mitchell sauntered into his house with his hands in his pockets—it must have been to shade them from the sun—and not finding any one in the general sitting-room he went to the kitchen. "Where's the missis?"

"Here! who wants her?" answered the sharp voice of his wife, and she turned heated to fever heat from her labour.

"What on earth are you doing?"

"Boiling preserves! Must be done—all the fruit is over-ripe as it is. Yes, you and others who only eat it, little know what it costs in the way of trouble. We wives have that part always!"

"Let it alone and come out!"

"What! to burn! No, thank you, Mr. M. I'll finish it

off now—It won't be long; and who can go out in this glaring heat, pray?"

"It is better out than in. In the garden under the tree it is pleasant enough. Come along."

"O you silly old fellow!" she answered, laughing heartily, and calling to the maid to remove her pan of steaming fruit. "You can't go alone—you baby! Always come, come! with you!"

"Better than go, go—eh, Mrs. Mitchell?"

"Perhaps it is. Get the girls. I'll come when this is put away."

"The girls are not to be found."

"Indeed! That's strange. Well, in three minutes."

And before her long-legged husband had taken many strides, stopping to pluck a ripe gooseberry or look at a flower, his wife was with him, feeling even that heat a relief after the fire.

"Have you called at No. 1?" she inquired.

"Yes, to-day. Not at home."

"You lazy man! Only to-day! No wonder there was no admittance. Only to-day! And I begged you to go a fortnight ago."

"I called when Russell first returned."

"Yes; I suppose you did?"

"That is enough. Besides, he is never at home."

"No, he works hard;—making a fortune."

"Mistake, Mrs. Mitchell! Jacob is not working at all."

"Indeed! What is he doing?"

"That is what I don't know. Very mysterious! Up to Exeter by coach at least three or four times a week."

"You don't say so! what *can* it be?"

"Isn't it at Exeter or near it that she lives?"

"Yes, I believe it is. What! do you really believe in that, Mr. Mitchell?"

"It looks like it. There is a man returns from a long sojourn abroad. Just arrived—scarcely sees his sisters but he is off to the death-bed of this pet lamb—or 'prodigy,' as the French say, or whatever she is. Girl doesn't die after all. Jacob stays scribbling, or perhaps doing nothing, at the counting-house for three or four blessed days. Sisters so hot and peppery nobody dares so much as nod. The admirable Betty appears with eyes so red and swollen that every one is talking. Mysterious house that No. 1; very much so. To conclude, the master leaves counting-house—partners distracted—a brig and a sloop, one coming in, one going out, wanting orders—master gone! Every day he goes, walks off—comes home by coach. Mysterious—eh, Mrs. Mitchell?"

"Nonsense. Of course I know—every one knows when the girl Janet was thought to be dying, that Jacob Russell, being her guardian, or something, is sent for and that Miss Russell is angry. I know as well as any one, for I got many a kick (in figure of speech, I mean, of course). She is violent against that girl. As for Anna, she is a poor dear shaky creature, like one of those toys you see at a fair. Any one may set her a-going, legs and arms. Poor dear! She ought to have been married some thirty years ago, and she would have settled into something respectable. I hate old maids, Mitchell, and that's truth! And our Bridget is pretty sure to be one, too!"

"Not so bad if they have a little money. Saved a deal of trouble, I think."

"O! but where's the money? Tell me that. If Jacob Russell marries not a shilling will come to our children."

"Pity! But I don't see how we can help it. Marry he will; indeed I'd not mind laying a wager he is married at this moment. Poor man, I pity him; 'tis a sharp battle to fight for a wife!"

"And such a wife! . A girl picked up, as you may say, from charity. A nobody, or worse, with bright eyes, and a temper seasoned highly with mustard and cayenne, to which may be added a few self-going lucifer matches." And Mrs. Mitchell laughed at her own conceit.

But this tête-à-tête stroll was soon disturbed by the young Mitchells bringing some friends to the garden, who were made warmly welcome and invited to remain for tea, which Mrs. Mitchell soon went back to prepare. The young folks interchanged scraps of gossip, and gathered what fruit there was. The father leant over the wall, watching a neighbour's movements in an adjacent garden, and enjoying the delightful breeze which was rising, and gave promise of a break in the weather.

About the same time, Mr. Russell was standing on the step of his counting-house, looking at the fast-filling basin. Some men were hastily putting a last touch to the vessel they had been tarring while the tide was out. A little sloop lying close to the quay was full of stir, preparing to go out with the ebb. Sailors' songs, children's screams and laughter, women's shrill calls,—all seemed to blend into a not discordant sound, and the gentle lap of the rising waters and turn of oars in the rowlocks, came pleasantly on the wings of the refreshing tide-breeze. Mr. Russell looked tired and grave, perhaps a little anxious; but in returning the many greetings of the people he smiled; and once when a dirty, ragged little urchin stood right in his path, bobbing out of what was meant

for respect, and then thrusting into his hand a bunch of monthly roses and wallflowers,—there was a light in his eye that was pleasant to look at. "Mother thought you'd, maybe, like 'em; they comed from the country, out o' Aunt's garden. Mother thought 'em cruel sweet, and told me to be sure and give these here to 'ee," was the explanation in truest Devonain twang, and then with another "bob," off the child scampered, according to orders. The mother was a poor bed-ridden cripple who owed more than any one knew but herself, to Mr. Russell. When any one gave her flowers she divided them with him. And Mr. Russell put the poor half-dead things carefully and tenderly into water, and placed them on his desk in the dismal counting-house. It enlivened his work wonderfully to look up and see these humble cottage flowers. Having returned to place these now, he hurried along quicker than usual,—consulting his watch and then taking a short cut.

Tea was made, and Anna, who now presided, assured her brother it was his fault if it was over-drawn. Miss Russell looked resigned to her fate, and fully prepared to swallow a nauseous mixture, in spite of its being the best souchong, with double refined sugar, and the richest and sweetest of cream. Perhaps it was not so very bad, after all, for her countenance relaxed, and a little conversation went on about sundry matters, Anna having some funny stories to tell about the examination of her "infant scholars," and she was pleased to make her brother laugh and her sister listen. When the tea-things were cleared, Jacob unrolled some parchment he had brought with him. It took some time to flatten, and then, placing it on the table, he looked at his sisters, and cleared his voice.

"Will you give me your attention for a while? I have something of importance to speak of."

Miss Russell took off her spectacles, and Anna drew her chair closer to her brother, and paused for a moment in preparing her work, which was stuffing a pincushion.

"You know," said Jacob quietly, "that there was 3,000*l.* which you ought to have received from our uncle, but which—"

"Which was lost through sheer carelessness on your part," interrupted Miss Russell, sharply. "Ah, Jacob, it was all your fault!"

"All! Entirely! Through my bad habit of delay and indolence, I caused you to suffer the loss. I have never forgotten it. This deed will secure to you, sister, and to Anna, the sum of 4,000*l.* each, invested in your names conjointly at present, and which is entirely your own, to be disposed of as you please at your death. This house and its furniture also is yours; and this is the deed of conveyance to that effect. If God prospers me, I shall hope to assist you further during my life; but this is independent of me."

"What a peculiar man you are, Jacob! What are you thinking of now?" asked Miss Russell, looking keenly at him, and discerning something unusual at work.

"Having, then, done my best to make up for past carelessness—having, I hope, provided tolerably for your comfort—I want you to grant me a great favour."

There was a visible tremor of voice now, a working in every feature which his sister had not often seen. He took her hand and pressed it.

"The greatest favour I can ask, or you bestow on me, sister! Receive my wife kindly when I bring her to you."

"Your wife!" exclaimed both sisters at once. "*Your* wife!" repeated Miss Russell, withdrawing her hand and putting on her spectacles. Then looking at him through them, and glancing from him to Anna—"Is he mad, do you think?"

"I was prepared for surprise," Jacob went on, not heeding the last words. "Of course it will surprise every one, as it does myself, that——"

"Oh, you have the grace to allow that!—"

"—At my age and with my habits, any one would care to unite herself to me. Yes, it is surprising!"

"Rather! rather so! I always knew you to be a peculiar man, full of fantastical romantic rubbish, engendered by novels, rhymes, and music; but—but—I own I *did* give you credit for a sense of propriety. I should have supposed the time for marrying had passed; especially as I am not aware that you have anything to complain of in your present home."

"Nothing, nothing! My home has been a safe and happy one."

"Well, but tell us who it is to be, Jacob!" put in Anna, resuming her pincushion.

He involuntarily looked towards his elder sister, who said, in her sharpest, coldest tone—"Well, who is it?"

Something about her reminded one of a bull which had paused in order to rally for a charge.

There was a pause—the only movement being Anna's fingers squeezing in the bran.

"Janet Nairn!" then was pronounced in a clear, firm tone, and Mr. Russell turned sharp round and walked towards the window.

Down dropped the pincushion, heedless of scattering bran,—back went Anna's chair with a shove; while Miss Russell's head fell slowly and stiffly back on her high chair,—her eyes following him, but for a moment speech failed her. Her fingers worked convulsively, and she gave two or three gasps as if something was tight about her throat. Then wrath overcame all barrier of control or agitation; with uplifted hands and shrillest tones she exclaimed—

"To be insulted in my old age—by you—by *you!* Good God! is this what I have lived for? To see my name, my parents' name, disgraced and stained! They would rise from their graves, if they could, and haunt you! I wish they may! I almost believe they will. A child picked out of the mud by us—a pauper!—a convict!—a girl who has treated us too in such a scandalous way! Yes! Come everybody—come Cousin Mitchell, with your odious vulgarity and familiarity, and crow over me! No—that she never shall! At least, I can keep *myself* from disgrace.—Good Heavens! Who would have thought it?"

"Such a mere child too, and so delicate—so much younger than you, Jacob!" observed Anna, unable to keep silent any longer.

"As far as regards that," he returned, much moved; "as to all the disadvantages to her, I have, I hope, weighed them well; and while I thought that only my own happiness was concerned, I did struggle long and hard, God knows it!—but—when—when I found that strange as it is, she loves me—that, in fact, her happiness is linked with mine—then, it was another thing, quite. Only lately, and by strange accident, came I to know the truth."

"Oh! So!—A very modest and womanly proceeding!

So she let you know her wishes! Upon my word—a nice girl! Discreet, and so modest! She must needs put every one on a false track; then, knowing she could not go on blinding me, before my very eyes, she must run off, and entice a man, old enough to know better, to follow her. The artifice of the plot!"

"And then to serve poor George Spencer so," Anna observed; "allowing his attentions, and courting his sister, and having a secret understanding with Jacob all the time. How very dreadful!"

"Sisters, this is wrong. Anna, you know that is not true. Say what you like of me. I will bear much, and make allowance for your old and long-cherished prejudice, but——"

"Prejudice! Hear him!"

"But, I cannot allow you to be so bitter and unjust to her."

"No; already your sisters are nothing, and this—this——"

He put his finger on his sister's lip to check her; pale and suffering he looked.

"Don't—don't say it. It is enough—do not say what you will be sorry for, some day."

"No, I shall not;—I shall never be sorry," she answered, pushing his hand back, and looking fiercely at him, though her lips quivered. "I, at least, am no humbug. What I feel I say. I don't make pretence to love—to love—one—and then—then—desert——"

"No, sister, that you never did. You are stedfast and true. Only believe me—give me the credit——"

"Jacob, don't be false! Stop there! I—the eldest—was early called on to put away girlish ways, and to face real life; rough life it was too. I—I—tried to do my duty to

all of you—many, then there were. One—*one*, I loved—and felt as a mother for. I thought—" (here her voice was stifled, but she rallied herself and went on again)—" This shall be to me, instead of what other maidens love—sweethearts, pleasure, and so on. And he was. I was just to all, crossing him perhaps all the more because—because he was the favourite—the Benjamin. Yes; I worked for him. I—I—liked him, and when he went wrong and did foolishly, and others blamed, I sorrowed. He was my all,—has always been my all. And now—*now*, when I am old and worn, going down to the grave— Pshaw, Jacob! What good are tears! You oppose me—deceive me—disgrace us all. And mind you, I am firm! Yes, and whatever it may cost me, I will not ever call her, *her*—sister! No, nor ever——"

"Don't — don't repeat it!" he said, in a weary, low voice. He had sat down close by her, and, leaning against the cushion of her chair, a tear had fallen. Now, he rested his arm on the table, shading his eyes, and looking very white and ill; so Anna thought, to whom all this was very mysterious. "Say no more, lest you repent too bitterly," he went on. "Only hear me, at least in this. I do *not* throw you off, or forget all you have been to me. My first wish is to be more worthy of, and a greater comfort to you. I thought, too, that a young, fresh life—that seeing me happier—my long, long loneliness of heart satisfied—for it is no proof of want of love towards you, if I have felt the want of what other men have—what God has made us all desire and wish for! But why say all this? I have been grievously mistaken. My happiness will be lessened—clouded; but God's will be borne!"

"How we do deceive ourselves!" ejaculated Miss Russell, casting up her eyes. "And to end this disagreeable conversation, which I will never consent to renew: pray when are we to expect this returned prodigaless? When is the calf to be killed, and the ring bought? What are your orders concerning household arrangements, rooms, and so on?"

"Your irony cuts me to the soul!" Jacob said, moving a little away, as if to avoid some blow. "You don't imagine I am going to bring her here? Can you suppose for a moment I would do so? Did I not say, I gave you and Anna this house? No, sister, I will gladly bring her, when you wish to see her—gladly; but only as an invited guest."

"You will wait long for that."

"I shall bring her to another place as her—our home. I think of taking the Quay Cottage, the one in which Captain Toms lived."

"Indeed! what, with the large garden?" asked Anna.

"Yes; there is a pleasant, old-fashioned rambling garden attached to it," he said, directly catching the touch of friendliness in her tone; whatever it proceeded from, it was just then very welcome. So he went towards her, on the opposite side of the table, and, standing by her chair, spoke of the house; a cottage merely, but with a pleasant look-out, and close to his counting-house. He thought hereafter of taking the old Flagstaff, as it was called, in hand—now a mere ruin: but once it had been the residence of the Russells; for many generations a Russell had lived and died there, till the father of these people left it, preferring to build a new house on the hill, to repairing the old place.

"I thought it was unhealthy," suggested Anna.

"So it is," said Miss Russell. "We turned out of it,

scared by typhus fever. No sane man would willingly live there. Some absurd, fantastical whim of old family pride. The old carvings in the cornices and ceilings are a perfect pest to good housemaids." Miss Russell rose from her chair as she said this.

"That was in the time of bad drainage. It is, I believe, remedied now," Jacob said, and looking to find out what his sister might want.

But she did not intend to give him the favour of handing her candlestick, and, to forestal him, she hurried on, and nearly tripped over a footstool. Anna gave a little scream, and wished "sister would not do so!"

Jacob lighted the candle, having possessed himself of it during the stumble. Miss Russell took it from him, with a determined avoidance of meeting his eye, saying, in a stony way, "Good-night. Excuse my retiring so early, and before prayer. Anna, don't let the bran drop about—and don't sit up late. Good-night."

She passed out rigidly, nor would she give one look round, although he sought it, and even opened the door for her. He would put his hand *on* hers, since she would not allow it to be *in*, and his usual tender "Good-night," was uttered with double emphasis and meaning. Then taking a few turns up and down, he was induced, by another question from Anna, to sit beside her—glad to talk of this new house, in her own fashion; of course, concerning the ornamental part of the furniture, which she entreated might be left to her taste and execution. Ottomans, screens, cushions, card-racks without end, were imagined, and planned; and, on his giving her carte blanche to get what material she pleased, and make what she liked, Anna was happy; and before

they separated, she said—"Well, I do hope you will be happy, Jacob; and oh, dear! I hope sister will come round, or what shall I do? But I do think you are rather too bad, knowing how she would hate it. You might have taken some one else, indeed. She is too young, and has a temper, too!"

CHAPTER XXX.

AGAIN AT WORK.

Janet had rejoined her pupils and their mother, for Mrs. Everly Smythe was too much afraid of infection to venture back to S——. Her reception of her governess was at first full of cold annoyance, and when in a business-like way Janet informed her of her engagement, she gave a little scornful laugh.

"To Mr. Russell, you say? And pray who is he?"

Janet explained, though not very clearly, that he was a merchant—an old-established house, and so on; and was interrupted by Mrs. Everly Smythe saying,

"So, after all, it was absurd gossip about Mr. Spencer! I said so. I knew it was not likely, though of course that sort of man would amuse himself. I was alarmed, Miss Nairn, for it is hardly desirable in your position to get talked of, and Mr. Spencer is one whose doings attract notice. Really I am relieved to find the report was without foundation."

"You are mistaken," Janet was provoked to say from the lady's manner.

"Why! do you mean?——"

"I mean that Mr. Spencer did propose."

A peal of laughter burst from the widow now. "Excuse me, Miss Nairn, but a very young person, not conversant exactly with society, is apt to fancy a great deal. And really, the notion of setting aside such an offer as that of Mr. Spencer's would be, for—for that of a merchant of Wareham, however worthy and highly estimable, is too much! Really, now, I would advise you not to say this to every one, for I assure you it is not a story likely to gain credit; or, I may add, to do you credit."

"I am not likely to trouble any one to believe or disbelieve what I say," returned Janet.

"You are right. And now I presume I may depend on your remaining with me till I can suit myself? It is provoking, just as I felt settled; and I am very particular as to who I have. But of course you are not in a hurry?"

"If I am not, I believe that Mr. Russell is; and he desired me to tell you—to ask you to spare me in a month."

"Impossible! It will upset all my plans. O, you must tell your admirer that I can't think of letting you go for months. And pray let it be understood that I object very particularly to any courtship here—before my children. You can appoint a place to meet him, if he desires it, now and then—once a month or so. But I must decline the honour of his visits here. I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance, and I make it a rule in my house, 'no followers,' eh, Miss Nairn?" A little light laugh was intended to carry off any unpleasantness her wishes might cause.

Mrs. Everly Smythe had unbounded faith in her powers of fascination and persuasion, and even felt that she had been charmingly frank and friendly with her governess. But

Mr. Russell did not take the same view of the subject. He told Janet in his next letter that he could on no account consent to her remaining more than a month or six weeks; —the latter only on condition that Mrs. Smythe really could suit herself by that time.

There was a melancholy tone in this letter from the feeling that there was no home from which he might take Janet to be his wife; not even a friend on either side to attend the ceremony. For though he made as much as he could of Anna's good wishes, and as little as possible of Miss Russell's objections, he confessed he dared not even hint at such a request.

Mr. Green had promised to give her away, and Mr. Russell proposed their meeting at a certain church on a given morning; from thence she would go "home" with him. In a postscript he added, that his good friends the Grants had offered to receive Janet, and if she preferred it she might be married at the old Wareham church. He should much like this, but doubted if Janet would do so.

He was right, for Janet decided at once on the first plan, and cared not to meet any of the old set, or go near Wareham, till she had the protection of his name.

Meanwhile, she had plenty of occupation in teaching her pupils, and there was one especial duty which weighed on her conscience, and which, however hitherto delayed, must soon be performed. She must write to Agnes Spencer, and, if she could, explain to this friend why she had so treated the brother. It was a painful task, and Mrs. Everly Smythe wondered what made Miss Nairn so flurried and nervous, so absent, and with such red eyes. She was annoyed, and spoke some hints as to "lovers' quarrels," and what

a bore it was, when persons were so silly as to get engaged, being blest with such a distinguished and such a peculiarly privileged home, as the Chantrey was.

This kind of conversation, and the fact of Mrs. Everly Smythe taking every opportunity of "snubbing" her governess, sometimes made Janet uncomfortable. But it would not last long; and then, though discreetly few, there were Mr. Russell's occasional visits. In one of these, Janet asked what the Grants had said of their friend's engagement.

"I suppose, as a matter of course, they did not approve?'

"Well, he thought I was rather old for you."

"Nonsense! After all, what is your age?—or do you know yourself?"

"Nearly thirty-six; but I have long learnt to consider myself as much more."

"I don't call that old," she returned.

"At any rate, rather so for you."

"Or I am too young for you, that's it."

"I don't see the difference, which way you put it."

"But I do. However, it can't be helped."

"Perhaps we neither of us wish to help it," he said, smiling. "Yet, Janet," he added, "we must face the truth. I, at least, ought to remember it constantly."

"In what way?"

"Not to rush blindly into mistakes. So much harm is done by overlooking the evils——"

"Evils?" she repeated quickly. "I suppose a long list of them has been held up to you—all my peculiar faults, and bad doings, and all? Well, take your warning!"

"My dear, the objections were only alluded to so far as to put me on my guard for your sake."

"I suppose they tell you to look sharply after me," she said, in a jealous tone.

"I ought not to expect you to look on life quite as I do," he returned, quietly. "I should try to keep myself young and fresh, and to bear in mind, what you at your age will be likely to like and require; that's it, Janet."

"Any one may know that you don't need to be warned of all this."

"But I do. And you also, Janet. You must consider what you undertake."

"But I don't undertake anything—I mean nothing particularly new. You have always made me obey you; and if I have not been able to help loving you, try as hard as I might, why shan't I be able to go on doing so?"

"What a blind fellow I was, never to see it!"

"No. It was all right. Do you suppose I would have ever let you see it?"

"If I had not had such a revelation, 'all in a flash,' as Betty would say, I should never have spoken. I thought it a duty to stifle my own wishes, and it might have gone on so always. In fact, I wonder now how it was ordered otherwise."

"I didn't show it. I am sure I did not betray myself," she persisted, anxiously.

"We won't quarrel about how it came to pass, at any rate. You need not fear that you were lightly won. But it was a curious case of cross purposes, which might have ended badly for me."

"But not for me, Mrs. Everly Smythe thinks," Janet said, laughing.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DIPLOMACY.

The Quay Cottage had workmen busy about it, both out and inside, and the gardener's scythe might be heard as he sharpened it, almost from Queen's Terrace.

Many a half hour was stolen from the counting-house by Mr. Russell, to stroll in and superintend, while Penn observed in confidence, that he didn't grudge him the pleasure, "for no man ever deserved it more; and if only the old missis would come round, how pleasant it all would be!" At which Betty would shake, and nod her head, and smile, and sigh, having almost a superstitious dread of saying anything, and being often heard to repeat the proverb, that stone walls carried tales, and little pitchers had long ears, and so on. But if prudence chained her tongue to others, Betty turned over the state of affairs in her own mind very often, and her anxiety almost made her ill. She watched over her lady with redoubled attention, trying to keep off all annoyances or "frets;" and seeing Miss Russell's habits gradually, yet surely, grow less and less active, Betty's tears would come. It was so "wisht," she said, to see the master come

in and go out, and never nobody to say a word on what was in his heart. So long, too, as he had denied himself all, to please others. And now—when he might be so 'appy, and all just like a fairy story—to see poor missis so "sot agin it —well, 'twas cruel galling! "Why you see, good now, Miss Anna," Betty would now and then venture to remark to her, "marriages be *or*dained in Heaven, and what's the good o' meddling when us can't make?"

Be it observed that when peculiarly excited, Betty's original true Devonshire dialect came out more strongly.

She kept watch while Anna was out, trying to make excuses, for going into the sitting-room, and asking a question, at the risk of a stern rebuke. But to know her mistress was sitting there alone, with her dark thoughts—all former attempts at occupation given up, unless when the others were present—it was more than Betty could bear. She also noticed—and privately wondered why her master did not also—that of an evening, Miss Russell made great pretence of sitting very upright, and knitting busily, whereas the poor fingers were jerking and letting down more stitches than she made; and sometimes even the thin blue lips would twitch, as she glanced up at her brother when his back was turned. When he was looking, she wore a face as unyielding and hard as a stone.

"No! her never will give in—no! not till doomsday itself!"

At last she could bear it no longer. She observed that her lady's appetite began to fail, and felt something must be done. Something—but what? One day Betty kept watch till her master returned, and then arming herself with an excuse, in the shape of some shoes she asked his will about, she led

him into her region, and then with solemn, tragic mystery, she closed the door.

"If you please, sir, don't you zim, missis is but poorly, sir?"

"Indeed! I had not seen it—how long and what is it, Betty?"

"She carries herself that high, nobody can see nothing. Her 'll sit mumchance from morn till night; but for all that 'tis telling on her."

"What is it, Betty, do you think?"

"O sir, couldn't you find something to say pleasant about you and dear Miss Janet? (please to pardon my boldness, sir). 'Tis that, I doubt, vexes the missis cruel. You see she don't mind me like, being as one may say used to me; and so I've heard her talking like this—'Aye, aye,' says she, 'winter and wedlock tames man and beast,'—the old saying, you know, sir; and then she'll shake her poor head, and look fit to cry. Says she, this blessed morning, speaking all to herself you see—'He's all cock-a-hoop now,' says she, 'but he'll live and repent, for though it begins with 'dearly beloved, it ends in amazement,' says she."

"What can be done? what can I do or say, Betty?"

"Excuse me, sir, for I didn't ought to say this here, but I think sometimes if you could take a step well forrard—for you see, sir, the ladies, bless 'em! was a bit hurt with poor little Miss Janet, and they feel it now. There's the cottage, you know, sir, and the furniture: missis knows right well all about it from Mrs. Mitchell and others; all is told, sir. She'd like to be consulted, sir, perhaps."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it, sir; 'tis her nature, and nature is strong, sir. She's been used to be first always, and to give advice.

She might be distant first along—but you wouldn't please to mind that, sir, would you? Hailstones are sharp, but they clear the sky. Missis has her flouts of a time, but, we must weather it a bit, and make her excuses, poor lady! She'll be sure to come round, for in her heart she's fond of you, I ween!"

Jacob smiled a little, and then saying he would think of it, and hoped some opportunity of breaking the ice might be found, he left the kitchen. But it was a difficult matter, for Miss Russell entrenched herself behind a wall of stiff and cold reserve, nor was the subject ever broached before her.

One day Mrs. Mitchell, with her husband, sauntered down to see how the workmen were getting on at the Quay Cottage, and there they chanced to come upon Mr. Russell, the first time of meeting him, since the event had been made known.

"Ah, ah! sly fellow," said Mr. Mitchell, looking very knowing, and poking Jacob's ribs with his long forefinger. "This is how we mind our business, eh? This is how we spend our long days—in the counting-house, eh?"

"Well, Mrs. Mitchell," Jacob said, mustering up a good face, "may I not claim your good wishes? or do you think I ought to be ashamed of myself?"

"Why, pray?"

"Because I was considered—and indeed really was—a staid bachelor."

"O, nonsense! I for one never so considered you. I knew you were a marrying man, Jacob. I always said so. But—— you know I am always candid, and tell my mind?"

"Yes," Mr. Russell returned.

"Well, then, this doesn't please me. I suppose I ought to keep it to myself—but what harm is there in it? and the

truth is, Jacob, I had provided a very good wife for you, in my mind. Why—I don't say she is a beauty—but beauty is deceitful, and passes away, and common sense and principles make a man prosperous. Bridget, now, would have been a better match for you, than this little gipsy! Where can she have learnt any housekeeping, eh?"

"She is young yet, and she has sense and can learn, and I am not very difficult to please," he returned, amused.

"So you think, all of you, once! Oh! anything will do! but wait!—wait a little, and then what will be her story, poor dear, of your words and looks, when the roast is burnt and the bread heavy? Ah! you have served us shamefully! But now I have had it out, I am better, and here—shake hands on it; and I hope all will turn out well."

"Thank you! And now a favour. Can you bring my poor sister to think less hardly of me and the engagement?"

"I? Oh, Jacob, where is your head? Why, I'd as soon face a loaded cannon! You should have thought of that before. I doubt Miss Russell's ever giving up in this. For from first to last she has had a jealousy against the girl, and even you must own, the little spirit didn't always behave very meekly. Poor man! so you have your troubles! And really I am sorry, and if I could help you I would."

"I'll tell you!" she added presently, in a cheerful tone. "Very likely if I propose or say a thing, she will contradict me. She always does, as sure as possible. It will need some courage, but I don't mind trying the experiment. And what will you do for me if I succeed?—Anything! That means nothing! Well, good-bye—I'll go and see about it."

As good as her word, Mrs. Mitchell would not give herself time for her courage to "ooze." She hastened forthwith

and rang the bell at No. 1. Miss Russell's orders were to admit no visitors, but Betty was busy and the girl didn't know; so Mrs. Mitchell went into the sitting-room. But her bold address failed her, and her smile faded, at seeing Miss Russell, apparently dosing, leaning back in her high chair, the knitting fallen on the ground, and her face pinched and lined, so as to make her some years older-looking since she last saw her. For Miss Russell to be caught dosing in the middle of the day was so unexpected and incredible a fact, that well she knew it would never be forgotten or forgiven, that she had so surprised her. Quietly therefore she glided back into the passage, and then, raising her voice to its shrillest pitch, she called out, "Miss Russell! cousin! may I come in?" at the same time rapping loudly at the door.

Miss Russell started and looked rather wildly around—then, on the question being repeated, she slowly gathered up her work, and said dryly—"Who is there?"

"May I come in?" and Mrs. Mitchell entered. "It is such an age since I saw you."

"I—I—don't receive visitors now. I have been much engaged lately, and not quite so well—a little rheumatic," she observed, rather eagerly.

"I am so sorry! But solitude is shocking—we can't allow you to seclude yourself any longer. I have been quite uneasy and anxious—hearing all sorts of reports of course! But the fact is I know you must be suffering—you must feel hurt, I am sure. How could Jacob lower himself so?—and you and Anna! For the whole family are brought into it."

Miss Russell began to look extremely angry, and drew herself up. "To what are you alluding?"

"Ah! Poor soul! No wonder you try to ignore it. Of course I see and understand. Yet with me, don't be on any ppp's and qqq's! I can sympathise! Why, as I tell my girls, it is not fair to them ;—it is no honour to be called 'cousin' by one of such low extraction. A shocking bad connexion, I must say. I thought Jacob, after waiting so long, would have chosen better!"

"Really, Mrs. Mitchell! Cousin, you say? I don't think my brother's wife need be very anxious to claim the relationship. Pray wait till I ask for your sympathy! It is more usual, more like good manners, I should say, to commence with congratulations. Not that I desire any. I dislike empty compliments, and deny myself to callers on purpose. But neither do I wish for, or will I suffer, my brother's affairs to be so talked over and criticised."

"You can't mean that you approve, surely?" said Mrs. Mitchell, herself astonished, at the very success of her experiment.

"I consider my brother old enough to judge for himself," she returned with dignity. "I may think the difference in years a doubtful thing."

"Yes! How you must rue the day you ever took her in, for, begging your pardon, a more unwise thing could not be done! Every one said at the time this would be the end, and how you would be caught in the trap one fine day!"

"Caught! Do you suppose that Anna and myself are blind? What if we also thought it possible? I see nothing astonishing. I am not aware of any impediment to his banns. If so, you may go and forbid them, I dare say."

"Dear, no! If you are content, so am I. Do you think I

must call on her then, and make a party for her? Of course you won't go there! That can't be expected."

"Why not?"

"O, no! nor would I, were I you, go down there about the furnishing. It will be a thankless task. She is sure to object and find fault. Young married girls always do. Their heads are turned. You are quite right to keep well out of it. I said so, when I heard them remark you never went near the spot."

"O! so that's what they say, do they? Can't they let people alone, to do as they like best?"

"Well, well—don't be angry! People will talk! And can I make myself useful, in looking out chintz or superintending curtains, &c.? Very happy to do it."

"Thank you, but I charge myself with that department; I leave Anna to the nick-nackery."

"Well, I'll say good morning then, since I can't help you. Now, don't fret yourself. I tell Jacob, he can't expect you to be pleased. I said, 'I shouldn't wonder if your sister never speaks to her, never mentions her name!'"

"Indeed!" said Miss Russell loftily; and, in return for Mrs. Mitchell's nod, so full of amusement, but which stood for sympathy, she bowed slowly.

Mrs. Mitchell met Betty in the hall, and there was an immense amount of nodding, and winking, and smiling between the two. For Betty had a great pile of chintz stuff, and no sooner was Mrs. Mitchell out of the house than in Betty staggered with her load, and out of breath, placed it on a table.

"What is all that, Betty?"

"Goods sent by Peters and Co. The boy said 'twas to be

left here for master to see and choose from. A mistake, I should think, and so I told him. Says I, 'This here should be taken to the Quay Cottage, my boy.' So he says he has to take a parcel further up the hill, and he'll call in by-and-by and see if he shall carry this down there. Will it be in your way, ma'am, or shall I carry it out to the hall? Only I was afraid of dust, you see. Pretty, neat, washing thing this! 'Twould make up neat, like your best ones. We could be sewing them here at home, and save a good bill, I fancy!"

"I am surprised at you! You forget yourself, Betty. It is for me to say what shall be done. Certainly there will be plenty for you and Lucy to do—I shall expect all to be done at home. Bills indeed!"

Left alone with the bale of goods, Miss Russell paced up and down, and fought a stout battle between her pride, and her inclination.

The cover had been left unpinned, and the patterns showed temptingly at the end, while little tickets of the price dangled, and seemed to say, "Come and read me!" Each turn brought her a little nearer, till she could see the figure plainly; —7½*d.*, 6*d.* "Not dear, I declare;" and in another minute she was fairly bending over them, feeling, pinching, and examining, till, in a luckless pull, one of the heavy pieces came thundering down, very near her feet.

There was nothing to be done but ring. Betty, however, heard the noise; and, frightened, she ran upstairs to see what it was.

"Pick this up. How many widths are there in that curtain? Measure, Betty!"

Betty's heart beat as she obeyed. It was hard work to refrain from a word, so full of delight was she.

"Four, ma'am! But what size is the window, ma'am?"

"I don't know—I forget. Betty, bring my shawl and bonnet; put on your own; we will go and take the measure at once. I like this pattern, and don't wish to lose it."

Betty did not want to hear more excuses. She only dreaded a change of purpose. No general ever marched in greater triumph, having secured a marked prisoner after a long chase, than did Betty, walking behind her mistress. She could hardly help smiling at every one she saw. While on the contrary, poor Miss Russell would have turned back had she dared. She was conscious and uncomfortable, fancying that people were watching her from behind blinds, or that those she met, stared hard. Then, if Jacob should be there! But it was too late to draw back now. She had been caught in a trap, she half fancied, and turned round to say something to that effect, angrily to Betty. But there was something so simple and honest, so full of joy and feeling in that countenance, that Miss Russell could not say it.

"Perhaps I am a fool for my pains," she observed. "Mr. Russell, I daresay, won't care for my opinion, and——"

"O ma'am, but he will. He has been longing to ask you this great while. I am sure master's fretted himself cruelly bad."

"Should he like it, *she* won't. Brothers' wives always turn up their noses at their husbands' family. No! I had been wiser to keep to my chair at home."

But luckily they were now on the Quay, and Miss Russell not having been there for some little time, she was pleased and interested in looking about, and observing what vessels were in. Once in the cottage, tossing her head disapprovingly at the garden as they passed through it, she felt in her

element, setting the men to take measurements, and looking at the domestic contrivances. Of course there was much fault to find. This was wrong, and that a mistake, and so on. But she opened every cupboard, and went from room to room, Betty being at hand to remove a basket, or brush away a heap of shavings, smiling at any expression of approval, and looking grave if anything gave displeasure.

While yet in the midst of this survey, Anna pushed in, full of exclamations at having searched in vain for her sister; and then, greatly delighted that the ice was broken, she skipped about in a very juvenile way, and chattered of all the works of art she was going to contrive for these rooms.

At last,—who should walk in, all unconscious of who was there, but Jacob himself! Whereupon Miss Russell declared she could not stay another moment. She was tired, and had business to attend to. When her brother tried to draw her arm through his, and to thank her in broken words, she drew back.

"Come, that's enough. If I didn't think that we (Anna and I) had been a couple of such silly fools, I should not have been here. Not that it excuses you quite. But you are perverse. As you brew, so must you drink. There is such a proverb as 'Marry in haste, and repent at leisure!' But take your way, Jacob! Not content with a sister, seek a baby for a wife! My time won't be long—I shan't be here to see—but I expect that one day you'll confess your old disagreeable sister told you the truth. Yes—who knows—but in this very room, trouble and sorrow such as you don't dream of—may overtake you? Marriage is a serious bond—and——"

"Don't prophesy such dark things, sister!" Jacob said,

giving an involuntary shudder at her words, and struck by a look in her face he had never before observed—a glitter in her eye, and a tension of all the features; "let us go home now, and do—you are tired—this once let me help you!—won't you?"

But she pulled back her hand, and signed for him to go first. Sadly, he obeyed. Even then, with all the exertion she had made for him, some shadow came between them! Must it be always so? Then, like lightning flashed as it were before him, the remembrance of another face. In this very room he should have that one, and none to come between or divide them! He walked erect and lightly, uplifted by the thought; and heavily and uncertainly his sister dragged herself on—tired, and feeling a weight she could not understand, but which the shadow on her heart prevented her from being fully aware of. "This once," he had offered to help her, was in her mind. "Ah! he was thinking of the time, when his hand and arm would be claimed by another!" And in her heart, Miss Russell tried very hard not to hate her—tried to think it was natural and right. Then, with sudden impulse, she stretched out her hand and caught his arm, as if clinging for support. Out of breath, she gasped presently, "I am tired—that's all." And so, holding by him after all, they returned slowly to No. 1.

"Sister, I am sure you are ill. Pray sit down before going upstairs! Have a glass of wine!"

Miss Russell did sink into a chair, and confessed to great fatigue. "It will pass presently," she observed, pleasantly, and then she thanked Anna for placing a footstool.

The wine did good, and very soon Miss Russell was right again. But she did not enter into the conversation which

Jacob and Anna carried on about furniture. She sat silent, looking at them sometimes, and stripping paper—her old employment. It was a peaceful and quiet evening, and Jacob was content and pleased. Once he looked up at his sister, as if about to ask something, and then stopped short. At last, when prayers were over, he held her candle, and was about to say "Good-night." "If she would but just mention Janet's name kindly once!" he thought.

"Sister, I am going to Exeter to-morrow, may I—will you not send a message—to—Janet?"

"Going to-morrow!" she exclaimed, and looking suddenly angry and annoyed. "Why so? Why go so often?"

"So often?" and he smiled.

"Ah, I see! Well, go! Of course my wishes are nothing—my company of no value."

"If you really wish me to be here with you——" he began eagerly.

"No; I wish for no sacrifice. Good-night! No; don't ask me, Jacob. Don't force me! I tell you I can't do it! She wants no message of mine. She has triumphed! She has won you away from me! The old battle between us—she began it from the very first. We will, I hope, be outwardly friends, to stop silly geese from hissing and clacking; but more than this—— No, Jacob—don't ask it!"

Something in her voice was different from usual, and moved him greatly. He longed to show her how he loved her;—to comfort her—to give her sympathy. He remained grave and pondering about it, and Anna, not quite pleased at his silence, said she must go to bed too, wondering what they always found to make such ado about.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A NIGHT VISIT AND MORNING SLEEP.

Rain was falling thick and soft. The whole sky was curtained with darkest clouds, and Mr. Russell had fears for the weather on the morrow, when he had hoped to go and see Janet. The splash against the window, and in the distance every now and then, a familiar sound of sailors running out the anchor, alone broke the quiet around him; and after some little lingering, thinking of this and of that, but mostly of his sister's peculiar character, Mr. Russell extinguished his lamp, and sought his pillow.

Was it a dream?—Mr. Russell started up with the uncomfortable sensation that some one was in the room. Calling out "Who's there?" twice or thrice, and then, as there was no answer, only a stir—a sensation, that a living creature was near him,—he put out his hand to feel for the matches, and encountered something which moved—something cold! It was another hand; its fingers met his, and closed with almost convulsive force, and then there was a sound of thick, gasping breath.

"Who is this?—Betty! Good Heavens! sister—can it be you?"—feeling her with his disengaged hand. "What is the matter? Stay—I will get a light! Speak!"

"No light! Why did you awake? I made no noise."

"How long have you been here? You are ill!"

"I am not ill—I could not sleep. I came here to see if you slept."

Her voice was broken and hollow, and full of suppressed agitation. He put his arm round her. "What makes you sleepless?" Then followed silence. He knew by her excessive trembling that she could not, and he dared not, speak. At last, shaking off his arm, she moved, and muttered to herself, "Folly! Nonsense!"

"No, my dear sister, 'tis no folly! Don't be ashamed, God knows I would comfort you, if I knew how."

"You can't. You—you have wrung my heart till it is sore—and then you talk of comforting me! It is idle, vain talking about what you don't mean—don't understand. Jacob!"—and her voice was so husky, he listened attentively lest he should lose a word; "you, and every one else, have judged me as hard and cold-hearted. Well! perhaps I have seemed so, more especially to you. Yet God in Heaven alone can know—what you have been to me! The curse—yes! you have been the curse of my life! Not your fault; no! But I ached for your love. I am—jealous. Jealous, Jacob! —not cold—not cold to you in my heart!" and she paused again, she could not go on directly. "I wished to keep you all to myself. Every look or word of liking which you bestowed on another, was gall to me—gall and poison! But I have never even tried to make you happy. No!—Let me speak, for the first and the last time! No! I have never even tried to make myself pleasant to you! And yet—yet, I have watched for a smile or a word of affection, and then—then—when it came, the devil was there, and turned it into

bitterness, for I suspected you—I never could believe you meant it."

"My dear sister! Indeed, indeed you wrong me there. Cold, selfish, and inconsiderate, ungrateful even, I may have been; forgetful of your trials and sacrifices, and bent on my own idle pursuits. But insincere—never, never! I have always loved and respected——"

"I know! Don't say that now. It was my own doing—my evil nature. But, Jacob! hearken to me now. You never returned my love; never! You can't measure it. How should you? You have been my idol, you have stood between me and my God! You have been for me instead of husband or friend. What was I to you? Next to nothing! And now—now—how is it? You love another. Your whole heart is hers. Don't I know it? I suppose it is nature after all! A bitter, bitter cup, but I have nearly drained it now. I hardly know what is the cause, but a strong impulse forced me here to-night. It is an odd feeling I have. I craved to hear and touch you. I stood and listened to your breathing. I did not think you would awake. But as it is, I have been led to expose myself as I never thought to do!"

She shivered strongly as she said this.

"Don't say so! Your words are dear and precious. I shall never forget this—never, sister. Henceforth you will find me more——"

"Nonsense, nonsense! No professions. But I will say this: that this night—yes, it is the first time, and you can never know how hard it was—this night I have prayed to God for a blessing on you and your marriage. Now, don't expect me to be any way different to-morrow. I am too old

to change; and mind, I don't—I can't approve of it——But now I am cold, so good-night. Good-night!"

And she hurried away, stopping for a moment at the door to forbid his rising or following her.

Those deep, strange, passionate tones—were they his sister's? And had all this treasure, this deep store of love, been there for him for years and years, and he knew it not? O, the wailing, bitter regret which the soul feels at the knowledge of opportunity neglected! Had we but known or guessed at what we at last find was felt for us, how differently should we have spoken and acted!

In every soul, probably, there exists some hidden treasure, as well as hidden sin. Should we not pause with reverence, and at least confess our ignorance—yes, even of the heart nearest and dearest to us? We owe it to each other—to watch, to wait, to hearken, if, maybe, some slight token may not prove just this—that we do not know all.

Mr. Russell had fallen into a habit of thinking that he even more than responded to his sister's love, though he felt that hers had been the more active or practical feeling. Younger by very many years, and under her authority, when he was a wild schoolboy, he had taken her many deeds of disinterested affection with gratitude, it is true, but with a secret feeling that in reality he fully returned all; that through temper she repulsed him, and that of the two he had perhaps the stronger regard and attachment. But however strong at times a man's domestic affection may be, it is not to him what it is to a woman. Sundry other things occupy him, his thoughts and sympathies branch out, here and there, and he does not even dream that the ivy which grows about him could, if it might, throw out tendrils to

follow his spreading—spread he never so widely. Rejected, it falls back, thickening and growing hard and knotty below; so much so that its presence becomes rather uncomfortable on the whole.

Then, if a man is susceptible, and apt to fall in love, it will lead him away from the old tie;—shyness, pride, many feelings intervene.

"This is natural, and she, the sister, no doubt has had her own experiences of it; every woman has."

So he believes.

But here is a mistake. Every woman has not. How can they? Hedged in by strict home duties, the eldest girl, perhaps, misses the shelter of the mother, and early has, herself, to become that shelter to the others. Some natures so circumstanced, may play at being in love, and fancy they know a good deal about it, through books, or confidential friendships with other girls.

But a person like Miss Russell, who is capable of only one intention, one bias, early setting herself to home duties and ties, relinquishes all, and everything, for these. Her temperament, strong and stedfast, rather than impressible or sentimental, would fall into the line marked out; more and more so as she journeys on, till all others are literally hidden from her sight.

By her side, she had, at starting, another glad to follow in her path. This one, chosen out from all others, within the prescribed domestic limits, kept near her for some time—with certain intervals of variation and deviation certainly,—but then it was in her power to call him back. To this end, all her strongest faculties, and even passions, were devoted, till her own life became, as it were, merely mechanical,

and to guide him was all her employment and aim. Yet her peculiar temperament caused her to erect not mere shadows, but stone walls between them. Since, as years came and went, she learnt that he would not run altogether with her, she resented every turning. Love turned bitter, and he thought her hard and cold, while she built a wall round her heart, and secretly she kindled there a great and devouring flame. Jealousy then crept in, for it was too hot—too tormenting, and love grew sick in such an atmosphere. Jealousy was strong and fierce, and kept incessant watch, showing a black and repellant mask. Jacob saw and fled. Then, smitten with remorse, he would try to return, but felt nothing but that blank, dead wall. Had he waited he might have caught the dull, stifled sound of agony—the wail of an aching heart. Had he once caught that sound all would have been perhaps understood ; but he sadly turned away, seeing no opening. Other voices called to him. Troubles and pleasures of youth, its pains and joys, all beckoned him away ; and he imagined that his sister could not return his affection ; that life's great cares had soured and dulled her. He owed her all kind attention, even to the giving up of his own will ;—all respect and esteem. She was good, he believed,—far above him, though not of his nature, perhaps. She would despise what she could not feel ; love and its ups and downs was only mad folly to her, for did she not scorn all the outward tokens of the same—ever preaching that deeds were better than words ? So Jacob had thought and judged. But now the wall had fallen ; through its ruins he had glanced in, and seen that prison of a strong soul. Too late he knew all ! She had loved him ! It was her one love, her sole care and occupation. If he could not feel it, she

argued, at least it should go to no other. Had he but known—had he exercised a little more (not forbearance, in that he had not failed, but that was not what she needed)—but had he only persevered more in his search to find the key to her heart——!

It is in this we all are apt to err. Because we do not see everything plainly at once, we are content to put it down to the deficiency of another, rather than to our ignorance. Yet each heart has its depths and its secret turnings and windings. And surely we owe it to those with whom God has ordered our lives to run, that we try at least, to understand them! We do not; and this is the cause of half the misunderstanding, and of the alienation between members of one family.

Too late we see all that was or might have been.—How different, often, from what we have hastily and superficially pronounced it to be!

In vain Jacob tossed and turned, sleep had fled before the unquiet, troubled thoughts this train of reflection had conjured up. But was it too late? Could he not from that moment resolve to study that strange, hidden heart—could he not, knowing now how great, how deep, and how painful was her love, answer it—at all events showing that he saw and valued it? His marriage would torture his sister. Perhaps he had been wrong after all. Had he long ago seen what he saw just now, perhaps it might have been different. It was the seemingly wasted, useless purpose of his life, which made it so hard not to form that other tie. But it was too late now. He must do all he could to reconcile his sister, and perhaps, if things went well, she would learn to be pleased in his happiness. Yes, other objects for her love and

interest might rise; and a child of his might after all heal the wound, himself had made. This idea soothed him. Carrying on the thought he at last fell asleep, just as life began to be stirring. But the twittering birds, the passing of footsteps, and at last, even the cries of "fish" and "milk" did not disturb him.

It was beyond the usual hour, and nobody was down. Betty wondered, and at last went to make observations.

* * * * * *

"Master! Mr. Jacob! 'Tis me, sir! Yes, 'tis late—I thought I'd see— Ill? no—sir! I aint no ways ill, but hurried a bit. Please, sir, get on your dressing-coat, and come into missis's room. I zim she's bad—indeed I do."

"I'll come directly," and urged by some presentiment he could not account for, Jacob with cold fear clutching at his very heart-strings, hastened to his sister's room.

What he there saw, in the dim light—for Betty, pale and shaking, held back the dark curtains half-way—was, he at first thought, death. Another minute undeceived him. "Send for Dr. Dean!"

"The doctor!" was the cry—"the doctor!" How often is that call repeated in our moments of sharpest need and terror, when our hearts sink low! and how readily and kindly is the call obeyed!

Dr. Dean was not returned from a far-off visit, to which he had been summoned in the night. Before even his assistant arrived, Jacob had closed his sister's eyes!

The only words which seemed to suggest themselves when first Anna came, in pale alarm, were—"How providential that I was lazy after a disturbed sleep, and had not gone from the house for my usual morning walk!"

No. 1, with its shrouded windows, was the topic of the place for that day. Very quiet was the house. Betty stealing about on tip-toe and speaking in a hushed voice, her eyes red and sore with weeping;—tradespeople coming for orders, and bales of black goods, brought by smart and genteel young shopmen, keeping Anna fully employed, together with the letters she had to write;—Jacob sitting alone, going over the history of his life and *hers*, which was now ended! Regrets, even passionate, for lost occasions of showing love, and smoothing the rough path, of one, sorely and greatly tried —resolves, sober, humble, and stedfast for the future filled his heart—while a shadow, as it were, from the past and the grave, fell on his own newly-kindled hopes and altered prospects. It has been said by one of the wisest and most observant in our generation, that the influence of the solitude of the great solemn desert (where, of old, Moses received his Divine commission, and where the Psalmist sang his inspired songs), is remarkable, and in itself of real intrinsic value towards deep thought and high aspirations. So also may be, the house of mourning. We do not too often retire alone to meditate, that we need hasten to curtail these opportunities God gives us. Our fear need only be, lest we too soon forget, or lest the impressions be merely fleeting and superficial.

When Mrs. Mitchell and other people entreated that they would not carry it "too far"—but restore the house to its usual sober light and cheer as soon as possible—Jacob felt that they were mistaken. But he acquiesced in the usual arrangements, and assumed no uncommon outward sign of mourning. After a large number of people had followed the dead to the grave in Old Wareham churchyard, No. 1 returned to its former appearance and state.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

THERE remains but little more to tell of this common-place story about quiet people.

"It is an ill wind that brings good to no one" was proved true in the case of Mrs. Everly Smythe, who boasted that she was generally a lucky person, and got her own way. Miss Russell's sudden death delayed her brother's marriage, so that Janet remained with her pupils much longer than she had at one time expected. But under the circumstances, Mr. Russell did not consider himself justified in delaying his marriage so long as he might have done, if Janet had been in a comfortable home. She had not entirely recovered her strength or look of health, and Mr. Russell was anxious to take her away from work and all annoyance, to the shelter of his own home.

The wedding could not be otherwise than very quiet, and he judged it no disrespect to his sister's memory to fix a day before the term of mourning expired.

Anna offered now to act as bridesmaid, but her brother refused, though gratified. He said their sister would not have liked it, and it was not necessary. "Then I shall be at your

new house, the Quay Cottage, to welcome you, as you are so stupid as to come back after only one week. After all, Jacob, it pleases me to think of the end! It makes a sweet little story, doesn't it? How plainly I can recall that night when Mr. Lewis first told us of the Nairns, and then your stumbling on them too! And our bringing home the strange little girl, and all the castles I built, all the efforts I made to educate her! After all, they have not been in vain. I have it to say that I educated and trained my brother's wife! and here I shall be, at hand to give her advice and hints in future. It is really quite like a story in a book, winding up, after some few ins and outs, with a wedding."

If Janet had little else to grace her marriage-day she had sunshine. It was an unusually fine, bright summer, and the little garden round the Quay Cottage was brilliant with beds of flowers, and its walks scrupulously smooth on the day Mr. Russell was expected to bring home his wife.

The basin was full with a high tide, and each flagstaff and mast was decorated with its flag, to do honour to one the shipping population respected and loved.

Within, Anna had arranged each chair and vase, cushion and mat, with what she considered peculiar taste, and Betty with extra red cheeks, but a tear glistening in her eye—her cap trimmed with stiff, white satin bows, and her black gown for that night replaced by a new grey dress—fidgeted here and there with tender anxiety and expectancy. "If only poor missis was here!—she was always so dignified-like, and would for certain have come round and done the honours for master kindly! But, there! her 's in a better place, no doubt, and 'tis wicked to wish her back, and I do believe she's friends up there with poor dear Miss Janet—that is—I beg her pardon

humbly!—Mrs. Russell,"—and here her words were cut short by the sound of a carriage. In another moment eager young arms were thrown round Betty's neck without much regard to the new cap.

"O, Betty, I knew you would be here!"

Downstairs Betty told the other servant that "it was the goodliest sight possible to see them two, as if they could never no more be put out or be unhappy like. She, looking up to him with all her spirit, and he as proud and pleased as any king!"

As it was finally settled that Anna should share their home, it may be doubted perhaps, that Janet was entirely without her trials. But Anna was not always there. She visited friends, and was always an important, busy woman, rather a worry at times, but not difficult to lead, if they took the right way.

No. 1, Queen's Terrace, became a girls' school, and in due course of time lost its distinguished character, by having a balcony added to the drawing-room window, on which stood a stand of flowers in pots, which were trained to climb up the sides. This, together with the busy bustle, and the merry voices of some six or seven young girls, quite altered the place, and Betty, as she passed, sighed and said, "Missis wouldn't know her own house!"

As to the Spencers, circumstances were so ordered that their lives drifted far away from Wareham. Agnes married an Irish baronet, and seldom or never left her pleasant home. Mrs. Spencer lived very near her, keeping up the pretence of a home for George, whenever his roving propensities allowed him to come there. He had become a keen sportsman, and not content with what he could find in the British Isles he

went to Norway, and then to Africa. In the letters which come pretty frequently from Agnes to Janet, she speaks of him as writing in good spirits, having at least outwardly recovered from the real disappointment, which for a time had laid him low in his first serious sickness.

Mr. Lewis had been presented to a good living far away from Wareham, and Anna pays an annual visit of several weeks to her friends, and perhaps those weeks are not the least pleasant in the year to Janet.

Many people think it a pretty sight when Mr. Russell takes out his little wife for a walk to his favourite haunts—to the cliff where the almond-scented convolvulus reminds them of Agnes; or on the beach, where the waves and their receding murmur seems to Janet to call up the Past, from which the shadows have vanished beneath the bright light of the Present.

> "The Present for thee
> Shall have distinct and trembling Beauty, seen
> Beside that Past's own shade."

THE END.

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